Black Flag

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Theory: On the reality of economic crisis

Analysis: 12 years of New Labour

Also inside this issue...

Bad time to be a cop

Greece and G20 as the summer of rage builds

Editorial

Welcome to issue 229 of Black Flag, the fourth to be published by the 'new' editorial collective since the re-launch in October 2007. We are still on-track to maintaining our bi-annual publishing objective; it is, however, difficult at times as each publication deadline looms closer, to meet this commitment.

We are a small collective, and would once again like to take this opportunity to invite readers to submit articles and indeed, fresh bodies to get involved. Remember, the future of Black Flag, as always, lies with the support of its readership and the anarchist movement in general. We would like to see Black Flag flourish and become a regular (ideally quarterly), broad-based, non-sectarian class-struggle anarchist publication with a national identity.

In Black Flag 228, we reported that we had approached the various anarchist federations and groups with a proposal for increased co-operation. Response has generally been slow and spasmodic. However, it has been enthusiastically taken up by the Anarchist Federation, who have submitted an AF perspective on the current economic crisis and a report on a new anarchist archive in Nottingham, written by an AF member involved with the project.

Comrades involved with Voices of Resistance from Occupied London have written an article on the Greek rebellion, which gives us an overview of recent events as well as putting it into a historical context.

As we go to press, the brutal and repressive arm of the State has once again reared its ugly head, this time on the streets of London, during the G20 demo. Police thugs left 100's of people injured, and tragically, Ian Tomlinson, a worker returning home, dead.

Recently we've seen an increase in occupations of workplaces and schools, a prison riot over conditions and a general increase in worker militancy in the form of wildcat actions. We call for independent working class organisation and solidarity, unrelenting class struggle, and direct action against the state, capital and all their associated trappings. As our front page suggests, we look forward to a "summer of rage."

Barriers: Some of the obstacles laid out which stop us from changing things can seem insurmountable. Picture: Anya Brennan.

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Ethos

Black Flag is for a social system based on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation – against state control and all forms of government and economic repression. To establish a share in the general prosperity for all – the breaking down of racial, religious, national and sex barriers – and to fight for the life of one world.
The Black Flag has been a worldwide symbol for anarchism since the 1880s. It is at base a representative of the negation of all oppressive structures.

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The state of play

MUCH of this article was written during the escalating credit crisis and recession, and before the government's bailouts of the finance sector.

However, though the ideology of neoliberalism looks broadly debunked after just a year of severe turbulence, there is no reason to believe that the attacks on the working class[1] described below will cease.

Certain aspects of Keynesian economics are making a return. Yet the transfer of wealth upwards, stagnation in pay, privatisations and marketisations which have characterised the neoliberal epoch look set to continue, with revised ideological justification.

If nothing else, this shows the class nature of the entire program. When the ideology doesn't fit the need to protect class power it is ignored, or redefined.

To understand the historical context of the New Labour project, we have to go back sixty years, to the glory days of "Old Labour"; the end of the Second World War and the establishment of the postwar settlement.

The postwar settlement was capital's attempt to secure itself against the chaos unleashed by the Wall Street Crash of 1929, and the upsurge in working class consciousness that accompanied the end of the Second World War.

Thatcher's heir: Tony Blair continued a thread of neo-liberalism that began with Callaghan

As an international phenomenon, it saw a dampening of the most rapacious aspects of "laissez-faire" capitalism – manifested in Keynesian fiscal and monetary policies which sought to regulate business cycles, keep employment high, and ensure economic growth. Class conflict was contained via the toleration of collective bargaining and the increased integration of supposedly working-class organs – the unions – into the governance of labour. In Britain, the settlement took the form of the welfare state.

This state of affairs was thrown into turmoil by the economic crisis of the 1970s. "Stagflation" – a combination of high unemployment, recession and high inflation necessitated a broad rethink of the organisation of capitalism. The ruling class had been unconcerned by a smaller share of the total wealth, compared to the cruder accumulation of the pre-war period, when post-war growth was high. With crisis, their class interests lay in annexing as much of the total wealth produced as possible.

Neoliberalism is both the ideological doctrine which became compatible with the material interests of the owning class in this new environment, and the political project to deepen their power which it justified.

Prior to the crisis, a recognisable proto-neoliberal ideology had been a minority view in certain circles, espoused by the likes of Friedrich von Hayek, Ludvig von Mises, Milton Friedman and, in his earlier days, Karl Popper.

Following the juncture provided by the crisis of the 1970s, it became championed by think-tanks well funded by wealthy converts, such as the Institute of Economic Affairs in London, academic institutions, such as Friedman's fiefdom in Chicago, and the Nobel Prize in Economics, controlled by a group of Swedish bankers unconnected to the Nobel institute. Concurrently, the bourgeoisie became increasingly organised, finding a banner under which to march in agitation for neoliberal "reforms".

Neoliberalism gained a playground in Chile, where Pinochet's dictatorship drafted in a team of Friedman educated "Chicago boys" to deliver an "economic miracle" based on "deregulation", which saw the working class hammered by the dictatorship and eventually economic crisis.[2]

As David Harvey has argued well, the redistribution of wealth to the bourgeoisie is core to the entire project.[3] Following the neoliberal reforms of the late seventies, the share of the national income of the top 1% of the US population had swelled to 15%, similar to its prewar level, by the year 2000.

The main substance of the attack on the postwar settlement took place under the Reagan administration in the US and under Thatcher here. In both cases, the triumph of a neoliberal program took place as a result of widespread discontent with stagflation, wedded to a reactionary agenda with xenophobia and nationalism at its core. Thatcher's victory in 1979 was based in no small part on courting the National Front's support by flirting with racism.

A rhetoric of individual freedom has long been a pillar of pro-market bourgeois ideology, and this was wedded to a vigorous media campaign against the "loony left" in Britain, the "liberals" in the US, and (according to Friedman), their "socialist" counterparts in power meddling with the market, all to blame for the economic crisis and its effects on living conditions.[4]

We shouldn't pretend, as leftists often do, that Thatcher single-handedly declared war on the postwar settlement and the working class. Callaghan had laid the groundwork by introducing monetarism and accepting the IMF's neoliberal mantra of rolling back the state and cutting spending.

But it was the Thatcher administration which undertook the project of radically deepening bourgeois class power in the UK. We know the story: privatisations of undervalued public services, regressive taxation, cuts in social provisions, imperialist warfare and a wholesale attack on the working class, social solidarity and that loony left idea that there is a thing called "society".

We know the results: massive unemployment, increased working hours, casualisation, the destruction of much skilled industry and the undermining of the ability of workers to make class demands. Inequality in Britain increased at a rate unequalled in any other industrialised country bar the US. [5]

New Labour did not just inherit this historical moment, they took it up as the only way to run an economy, and spun it as the means through to provide a redefined "progressive" program of "choice", "mobility" and "opportunity".

We should recognise New Labour has been marked by an almost religious belief in the efficiency of the market and the private sector, and the need to subjugate working conditions and social provision to the need to provide a "good business atmosphere."

We will here discuss the forms this attack on workers and the gains of the postwar settlement has taken under New Labour. It should go without saying that this is not in defence of "social democracy", or Keynesianism. Capitalism in all forms is exploitation, and social democracy is often its last-ditch defence tactic.

Nonetheless it would be naïve to think that the neoliberal project is not of tactical importance.

for New Labour

In focus: In a three-part series, Tom Gaynor examines the deeply cynical roots of Labour's "prudent" politics

Living and Working Conditions

Under New Labour, inequality has reached unprecedented levels. Under the Tories the government ceased publishing information about inequality, in an attempt to obscure the reality of the situation. New Labour's socially-conscious neoliberalism represented a more sophisticated version of the same project, with promises of "inclusion" in a supposedly booming economy, and the insistence that more and better training was the best way to help people make their way ahead.

As a result, such information may not be obscured, but it is not a political reality, and fighting inequality, along with anything nominally socially democratic, has been jettisoned from Labour's program. Such an attitude has been described as a "cultural" model of poverty – that poverty is only meaningful when it is absolute, and that poverty is a lack of aspiration and proactive involvement in the jobs market.

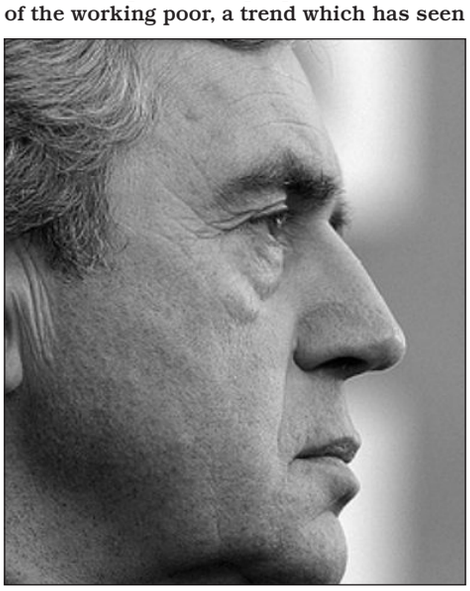
This worldview is summed up well by Jim Murphy, former Minister in the Department of Work and Pensions who said in 2007 that the "progressive" task of government was to emancipate "the almost limitless aspirations of the many and lifting the near-fatalistic intergenerational poverty of aspiration of the few", adding, "we must not falter at the thought of further transformation to public services."[6]

In 1994, the Institute for Public Policy Research established a "Commission on Social Justice" to redefine what is meant by inequality, and which was used by New Labour as a rationale for turning its back on its prior ideology and concentrating instead on "inclusion", "mobility", and the abolition of the most extreme and emotive forms of poverty. However, ten years later, the IPPR reported that economic and political life have become completely polarised "according to class and wealth" in Britain.[7]

Rising inequality has certainly been a fact in Britain since the 1970s. As was the intention, the attack on the postwar settlement in Britain saw a redistribution of wealth upwards into the pockets of the ruling class. Britain is now one of the most unequal countries in the Western world. In the 1970s, the incomes of the richest 10% were three times higher than the poorest 10%, but by the end of the 1990s this had increased to the extent that the incomes of the top 10% represented half of the total wealth in the UK.

In 2007, inequality was found to be at an all time high, whilst the richest in society have not grown in number, they have simply become richer.[8] The wealth of the richest thousand individuals in Britain has increased fourfold since the election of New Labour, and increased by 20% in 2007 alone.[9] Even as the recent global crisis of capital has been driving down the living standards of workers, the richest bourgeois have become even richer, with the total wealth of the members of the Sunday Times Rich List increasing in 2008 by £53 billion to £413 billion.

As a substitute for its prior vapid commitment to socialism, New Labour instead made grand promises to abolish the most extreme forms of poverty. Absolute poverty has decreased, as a result of Tax Credits and the like. But all this achieved has been to push more people into the ranks of the working poor, a trend which has seen relative poverty (what really matters when assessing wealth in an economic system) grow.



Attack continues: Gordon Brown

New Labour has pushed those in absolute deprivation into low-paid work, largely dependent on the service industry, which drops those concerned straight back into absolute poverty when it dries up. New Labour's introduction of a minimum wage (60 years behind the U.S.) has done much to legitimise poverty pay in precarious work and the service industries.

Child poverty was another emotive issue which New Labour used as a figurehead for its socially caring neoliberalism. Though the number of children in poverty has dropped from the 3.4 million of the late nineties, it rose again between 2005 and 2007 and stands now at 2.9 million, 400,000 above the target for 2004.

According to UNICEF, Britain ranks alongside only the US as the worst place in the developed world to be a child, blamed on growing inequality and what they call "dog-eat-dog" culture. This social alienation is accompanied by media demonisation of poor youths and punitive treatment from the criminal justice system – the same system which fails to protect them from domestic abuse.[10]

The accession of Gordon Brown has seen attacks on the poorest workers intensify. Corporation tax was cut below the levels of other Western nations. The only country in the EU to tax the rich less is Luxembourg. Meanwhile, the very poorest workers were again attacked by the abolition of the 10% income tax rate, making 20% the new starting rate.

This shoring up of ruling class economic power at the expense of those at the bottom of the pile was spun as the progressive politics of aspiration.

Britain has the longest working hours in Europe, and the lowest amount of annual leave. Those working for more than 45 hours a week now comprise a fifth of the workforce. It is factory workers who are most likely to be in this category, with management working similar hours to their EU counterparts.

Similarly, unlike most industrialised countries, the UK has no eight hour day. New Labour's Working Time Regulations of 1998 brought in some form of limit with 48 hours a week being the legal maximum. This, however, can be signed away, and this forfeit is often written into contracts.

The legislation has had the effect of pushing much private-sector employment towards this limit, resulting in the broad increase in working hours in years since. Its effects on working conditions have led to rising stress with its corresponding effects on mental and physical health, and on our personal relationships in our "free" time.

Unlike the model in the US, where workers are unambiguously worse off than their parents' generation, the stagnation of pay is not as glaring and well understood here. Many studies argue that real wages have increased.

But by far the greatest growth has been seen in the pay of the very top earners. When looking at figures for "average" real wages we should bear in mind the distortion that increased inequality brings about – the real wages of the bottom 10% of the population, for instance, have had no growth for the previous twenty years, whilst the top 10% have seen real wage increases of 50%, wedded to a rampant bonuses culture.

Fig 1

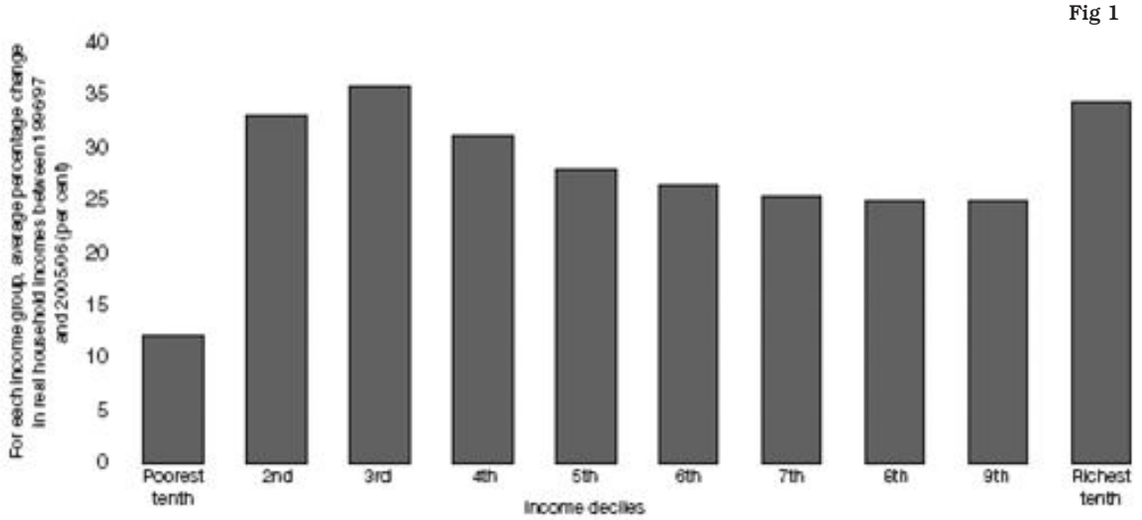


Fig 1: Except for those at the top and bottom of the income distribution, household with below-average incomes have enjoyed bigger proportional increases over the last decade than those with above-average incomes.

Fig 2: Three-quarters of the total increase in incomes over the last decade has gone to those with above-average incomes and a third has gone to the richest tenth.

Though executives are managing to increase their pay despite the credit crisis, its recent effects have stagnated the wages of workers. Real-terms pay cuts in the public sector have been a deliberate attempt to bring this about. But the figures often obscure the reality.

The same statistics can be used to reach different conclusions, when presented differently. The graphs on this page show that proportional increases in income for the poorest can easily obscure the overall picture of increasing inequality.

When we look at the wages as a share of GDP, a more telling way of assessing real wages and which is usually left out of assessments, a different picture emerges. Wage share by GDP has declined throughout the last decade – a picture which holds for the working class throughout the West.[11]

That productivity increases have also not been met by corresponding increases in remuneration shows clearly the logic of neoliberalism – and increased rate of exploitation and the transfer of more of the total wealth produced to the ruling class.

The overall hammering of the quality of life of workers is reflected in the UN's human development rankings for 2007/08, in which Britain, at 16th, lags far behind the less neoliberalised societies of France, Spain, Sweden and Norway.[12]

Additionally, real wage figures often don't take into account one the most important measures – the affordability of homes. Young workers a generation ago were much more able to buy houses.

This is inconceivable now. Home ownership is out of the hands of many, and when possible is tied to startling levels of personal debt.

The illusion of great prosperity across the board has been premised on unprecedented levels of debt-fuelled consumption, leading to a situation where UK debt stands at well over 100% of GDP, compounded by borrowing to fund the bailouts of private interests which presume a short recession and swift recovery.

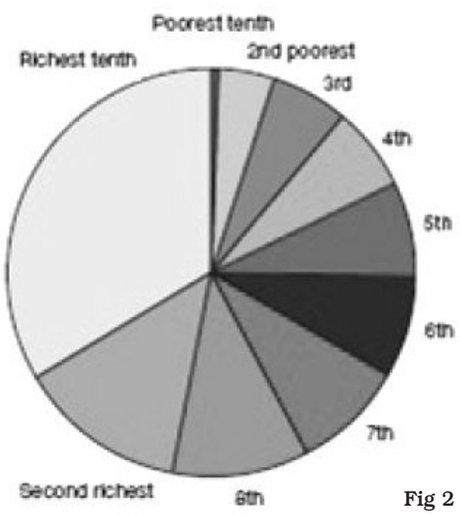


Fig 2

Wishful thinking, in other words. Moreover, purchasing power gets us less far than it would in the 1970s and 80s because of the fact that many "luxuries" are in fact essential for much work and to enter the job market – mobile phones, computers and internet connections for instance.

Privatisations under New Labour

The expansion of private inroads into public services made by Thatcher has been central to New Labour's new, "non-ideological" approach to governance. A few words in advance. Unlike Trotskyists and other leftists, we should not make this a moral issue.

The libertarian socialist position should not be to fight privatisations because ownership by the state means common ownership. The state and the community are not the same thing, far from it. Unlike Trotskyists, we do not see formal ownership as determining whether something is capitalistic or not.

Our reasons for fighting privatisations should be that they are direct attacks on the living and working standards of our class. Marketisation and privatisation drive down wages and working conditions of staff, its inefficiency affects our standards of life, its antisocial priorities undermine our social and intellectual wellbeing.

Pay and working conditions are worse in the private sector, hence the use of privatisation to attack conditions. NHS staff in Surrey demonstrated their awareness of this when they voted with a majority of 84% against the privatisation of their workplace in a union ballot. They were ignored, and 700 NHS workers were transferred to Central Surrey Health, a flagship private social enterprise.

New Labour privatisations are strikingly based on a purely ideological belief in market efficiency which has little basis in reality.

Massive, inefficient, public subsidised Private Finance Initiatives have been a central feature of Labour government, and their failure to deliver their stated aims shows their real function – the deepening of class power by transforming more and more sectors of society into fronts for private accumulation.

This use of privatisation can be seen well in the "deregulation" of the postal sector. Introducing competition into postal services has brought about no benefits whatsoever to customers, but has been a boon to big business.

The mantra of "modernisation" and has been used to attack workers in the sector, with recent disputes over pay, pensions, closures and redundancies symptomatic of the use of privatisation and competition to drive down working conditions as established organisations engage in the race with new competitors to the bottom, and "restructure" themselves to become more market efficient.

By Tom Gaynor

Notes

1. 'Working class' is understood not in sociological terms but as a material relation – the working class have nothing to live on but their ability to work for a wage. The ruling class includes private capitalists and those with meaningful control over capital.
2. Iain McKay, An Anarchist FAQ: section C.11: Doesn't Neo-Liberalism in Chile Show That the Free Market Benefits Everyone?
3. Harvey, D. A Brief History of Neoliberalism
4. The contradictions of this analysis will be addressed in part 2
5. Card, D. Blundell, R. Freeman R.B. (eds.) Seeking a Premier Economy: The Economic Effects of British Economic Reforms 1980-2000. Page 275
6. Gerry Mooney: 'Reframing the Poverty Debate' the New Labour Way. Variant no 29
7. wsws.org/articles/2004/aug2004/pove-a19.shtml
8. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Poverty, Wealth and Place. hjrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/2019-poverty-wealth-place.pdf
9. BBC News, 28/04/2008. news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6603893.stm
10. wsws.org/articles/2008/jun2008/chil-j18.shtml
11. loli.dk/~/media/loli/PDF/Lige%20lon/loengabenchmarking2008%20pdf.ashx
12. United Nations Human Development Statistics: hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/

Gloves off: Photographs over the December-March period. Clockwise, from top right, The burning of the Athens Christmas tree, a protestor is injured at a demonstration, the aftermath of a grenade attack on a migrant hangout, broken windows in an upmarket area of Athens, and a debate at the university of Thessaloniki, where students harangued their vice-chancellor having occupied part of the campus in solidarity with Konstantina Kuneva (see below).

Pictures: occupiedlondon.org/blog

The junta war, it never ended

Overview: The recent Greek Rebellion and its background

'December was only the beginning', echoed a slogan across the streets of Greece at the time and yet beginnings occasionally also signify ends: The 2008 rebellion marked the political end of post-dictatorial Greece.

While the country's most recent dictatorship (the seven-year long "Colonels' Junta", "I Hounta ton Sintagmatarhon") officially ended in 1974 the Greek political elites never entirely abandoned the state apparatus of the dictatorship.

To the contrary: the majority of the junta's police and army officers, judges, academics and local politicians held their positions until retirement while several current MPs had open relationships with the dictatorship's regime. For example, the current vice-minister for public order (police), Christos Markoyiannakis, had been appointed attorney general by the junta regime. The regime's continuation can be traced at a symbolic level as well: Two policies the junta emphasised the most were army conscription and bi-annual school parades – both are very much alive to date.

The breaking away from the dictatorship was only partial, as several of the junta's torturers and high-rank officials were walking free on the streets. What is more, the state did not prosecute the dictators themselves for their crimes: For example it was a group of lawyers that initially sued for the bloody oppression of November's 17th 1973 rebellion and only thanks to them did some of the dictators finally end up in

prison. Several parliamentary democracy officials wanted some kind of resolution and therefore supported these prosecuting efforts.

Yet the post-dictatorial regime at large identified the anti-junta struggle as a potential threat to the new regime itself. Faced with the radicalised parts the society (which had the confidence of having overthrown an entire dictatorship) the post-dictatorial authorities were quick to organise the new regime's defence. The riot-police force, for example, was founded only months after the end of the dictatorship.

In 1981, socialists (PASOK) won the national elections under the banner of social "change" ("allagi") which, unsurprisingly, never came – especially in terms of state repression.

By 1989, when the socialist government fell, drawn into an ocean of financial and political scandals, police had assassinated at least four activists on the streets of Athens during riots under both socialist and conservative governments (Koumis and Kanellopoulou in 1980; Kaltezas in 1985; Mauroeidis in 1986).

The 1990s found Greece anew with a conservative government ("Nea Dimokratia", New Democracy) applying some of the most reactionary policies since the time of the junta.

Inconclusive: Students on the streets in the run up to the collapse of Greece's military junta in November 1973. Elements of the old regime continue to hold positions of power

The collapse of the socialist block, the sudden transformation of Greece into a migratory destination and the so-called Macedonian question preoccupied a large part of the Greek population, which failed to effectively react to the conservative agenda.

The collapse of the socialist block also caused consecutive splits in the country's communist parties and some wider turbulence within the Greek Left. PASOK once again seized power in 1993, only to continue on a similar neo-liberal wave: A combination of a third-way Tony Blair-like approach and the conception of a so-called modernisation of Greece were to aim directly at the social freedoms won by the anti-dictatorial movement.

Indeed, this modernisation agenda paved the way for some massive infrastructure projects, especially under the pretext of the nazi-reminiscent fiesta of the Olympic Games. Contractors were well fed; stinky financial scandals became a near-daily routine for almost a decade. In 2004 the current (Nea Dimokratia, conservative) government returned to power. The same policies were to be continued, if only in a more blatant manner and with the greed of a party that had been deprived of blanc access to public money for eleven years.

The picture was gross:

1) The Greek state was faithfully applying EU and domestic neoliberal recipes to shrink the public sector and businesses' contributions, at the expense of the majority of taxpayers. The introduction of the euro and the massive price increases that followed comprised the landmark of these policies.

2) The defence budget of the country was (and remains) in the top-25 in the world.

3) A small economy like Greece organised the 2004 Olympic Games, which (officially) cost 7.2 billion euro, causing enormous public debt.

4) High and mid-rank officials (government, politicians, judiciary, financial clerks, the clergy etc.) became increasingly involved in scandals regarding public money.

Since the end of the 1990s the state's need to somehow manage the amassing national debt became urgent – and the only funding source not coherent and organised enough to defend itself was the general public.

Thus Greek society got taxed higher while the average income continually dropped. In the past few years, Greece has become a country with Northern European prices, Greek (low) salaries, increasing unemployment rates and ever-fewer social provisions. Meanwhile, there was a single provision the Greek state was to plentifully provide: oppression.

A rapid increase of police personnel (as of Feb. 2008: one police officer per 214 citizens, the highest rate in Europe); the creation of new policing units (border guards, special guards etc.); the increase of prisoners (e.g. in Jan. 1999: 7,280 vs Nov. 2007: 11,120) and the introduction of police-controlled CCTV on the streets painted a new, bleak picture.

A society that was gradually becoming poorer and ever more exploited was simultaneously faced with increasingly aggressive state and justice oppression.

Organising the other side

Lining itself up against the state, the social antagonist movement in the country slowly started to emerge as early as 1974.

Ongoing acts of resistance to the various reactionary policies included wildcat strikes at workplaces; a mass grassroots student movement; massive demonstrations and strikes; occupations of universities and schools; a strong anti-fascist movement and the appearance of the first few squats and social centres in Athens. The post-dictatorial anarchist movement was born amidst these movements. Today, the Greek anarchist movement is definitely one of the largest in Europe in the number of people, publications, demonstrations, direct action campaigns, social centres and squats that it involves.

During the 1990s this ever-increasing strength of the social antagonist movement caused a backlash from the state. The 1990s started and ended with two massive secondary students' movements against neo-liberal education bills that different governments were trying to introduce.

In the middle of the decade, on November 17th 1995, some of the most intense street-fighting since the end of the dictatorship saw hundreds of anarchists occupy Athens' Technical University in solidarity with the prison inmates' rebellion of the time. The night ended with what can be perceived as a turning point of the Greek anarchist movement: more than 500 anarchists were arrested following a police raid of the Athens Polytechnic.

This, supplemented by a similar event in 1998, caused a significant stagnation of the Greek anarchist movement. Greek anarchism nevertheless revived itself only a few years later, aided significantly by the emergence of the movement against the globalisation of sovereignty. This revival saw a rapid increase both in the number of activists and the political impact of anarchism in the country, now larger than ever before. Even with all its renewed energy and strength, the anarchist movement in the country alone wouldn't have been able to create the string of events that unfolded from December 6th onward and culminated in last year's riots following the killing of Andreas Grigoropoulos.

The rebellion only became possible when the movement finally met with the thousands who, for all these years, had every reason in the world to take to the streets and yet wouldn't dare do so. Alexis' assassination made painstakingly clear the brutal face of authority that people had been sensing for so many years.

December 6th 2008 was not, then, a day on which Greece changed. It was the day on which a number of previously mounting tensions simultaneously exploded. The political tension of post-dictatorial struggles, economic tension in the era of the Euro and social tension in a country where newly arrived migrant populations would join previously present ones in an increasingly defensive position against exploitation and repression.

Last but not least, the bullets of killer cop Korkoneas were shot at the very heart of Exarcheia - the central Athens district that has comprised an epicentre, in symbolic and real terms, of the majority of the post-dictatorial social struggles in the country.

In this sense Alexis' death was not unique. When Korkoneas pulled the trigger, he was adding himself to the long list of state-employed assassins in post-dictatorial Greece. Their victims have included demonstrators, teachers, students, migrants, those in struggle – all people the police had decided, for whatever reason, should no longer exist. Alexis' death was not unique and yet it came to encompass all the previous deaths into one. For once, for so many, revenge felt just: a cold-blooded assassination; the victim, his age, the place, the time and the way of his execution made revenge feel necessary.

One of the elements which made December's revolt unique was its geographical spread – far surpassing Exarcheia, Athens and Greece. Demonstrations and/or riots were reported in almost every single Greek city on the night of Alexis' assassination while more than 200 solidarity actions took place across the world. Back in Athens, the revolt travelled from Exarcheia out to the suburbs; municipal buildings and town halls across the city were occupied; tens of local police stations were attacked. As the mainstream media fearfully reported, Exarcheia has spilled out to the rest of Athens and Greece".

The days and weeks that followed the assassination were truly and entirely outside what Greek society had experienced in the post-dictatorial decades and so they came to mark this era's very end. Two certainties broke suddenly and violently: the decline of mass social action and the up to that point seemingly unavoidable rise of neoliberalism and atomised greed.

Suddenly, the old social and political divides of the dictatorship re-emerged amidst the smoke, in Athens and all of the country's major cities. Society was polarised and the old lines were redrawn – this time by a barricade, a university gate, a line of students holding hand-by-hand... The old social divide appeared anew: Behind the barricade or in front of it, defending the university or attacking it, for the rebellion or against it.

Attacked: Konstantina Kuneva, a migrant worker and grassroots syndicalist, who was nearly blinded after she was assaulted by employers' thugs armed with sulfuric acid.
Picture: occupiedlondon.org/blog

Rioting: But anarchists were aware that the heat of direct conflict could not last

Carrying On: The aftermath of the rebellion

Having found themselves in the core of the revolt in the days after Alexis' assassination, anarchists were quick to realise that the rebellion in the form of such intense street-fighting could only last for so long: People were getting tired while the state was fighting back with its tools of propaganda and repression.

In realising this and in looking for new forms to continue the struggle, anarchists were thankfully not alone. Now joined by many of the thousands who met on the streets of the Greek cities those days, they shared the refusal to go back to the old status quo – and the desire to "leave no attack unanswered any more", as the slogan would go.

And so, a number of grassroots neighbourhoods assemblies sprang up and, "in the spirit of December", actions are now decided not upon what is illegal or legal, but what feels just.

One of the most prominent examples so far would be the one of the old parking place lying on a block in Exarcheia, only a few meters from the point of Alexis' assassination. In the last few months the abandoned parking place has been reclaimed by locals and, in a guerilla-gardening first, it has been transformed into a much-used public park.

The most important example of political mobilising in the post-rebellion era, however, would be the case of Konstantina Kuneva. Konstantina was a migrant, single mother, cleaner and militant grassroots organiser at the Athens-Piraeus Railway (ISAP), employed via a subcontracting company.

On December 26th 2008 Konstantina was attacked with sulphuric acid by employer-hired thugs, as an act of revenge for her militant organising activity. The attack has left her near-blind and with severe speaking and digesting problems.

In the face of Konstantina, December's movement saw all the reasons that made it take to the streets – and all the reasons for which the continuation of the rebellion was necessary.

Buildings were occupied across the country (including the headquarters of ISAP in Athens); the office of her subcontracting company was smashed up.

Solidarity assemblies and actions took place on nearly every major city – most recently, a three-week long occupation of the administration building of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki not only expressed its solidarity to Konstantina but also demanded the university ends the practice of subcontracting labour as a whole.

It is hardly surprising to see that the Greek authorities have tried to repress December's movement and actions that sprang out of it.

More than three hundred people were arrested during December's events - including approximately fifty migrants who were denied interpreters and lawyers in court and convicted, now either awaiting deportation or having already been deported. Another thirty arrestees were ordered into pre-trial detention (which can last for up to 18 months) and to date, at least fifteen are still awaiting trial in prison.

In what seems to be the next planned act of state repression, newly-instated Attorney General of the Supreme Court, Y. Sanidas, has ordered an investigation into some of the oldest and most established anarchist occupations across the country – most likely a prelude to coming eviction attempts. The howling threats against the anarchists by Markoyiannakis, the vice-minister for public order and junta-appointed attorney general, come to aurally symbolise where the two regimes meet.

The urgent question for anarchists in the country is once again how to organise against and beyond the confines of authority – and this time, in their attempt to answer this question they are thankfully not alone.

VOICES OF RESISTANCE FROM Occupied London

Dimitris D and Antonis V are writers for Occupied London, which ran one of the top blogs on the Greek Riots.
occupiedlondon.org, email: dimitrisd@occupiedlondon.org or antonis@occupiedlondon.org.

Putting the shh into smashing the state

The Sparrows' Nest is a self-styled 'Centre for Anarchist Culture and Education' in St. Ann's, Nottingham. It was set up in Autumn 2008 by the Anarchist Federation's Nottingham group. We wanted to make contemporary, classical and international Anarchist ideas accessible to an even wider number of people in a town already vibrant with anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist culture.

Anarchism has a very literate tradition. Its early history features working class autodidacts, radical educators, migrants composing powerful polemics in a second language, and people learning how to write and produce literature in order to get their ideas across. We have always had to do this for ourselves, and against the odds.

Rad-lit: Reading in the Sparrow's Nest anarchist library. Picture: indymedia.org.uk

In Nottingham we wanted to celebrate this culture and make more of it available to people in a spirit of self-activity and mutual aid. So, we pooled our book collections, spare-time and resources to make a space where people can read and discuss anarchist ideas with both people firmly committed to them and people encountering them for the first time. We got the idea from Anarchists from southern Europe and South America who we met through the International of Anarchist Federations.

Hearing about their own info-shops, education projects and libraries was inspiring enough, but the developing economic crisis made it seem more important than ever that people should encounter anarchist ideas freely and easily. To echo Ade Dimmick's article in BF 228, the printed word still has an important role to play in bringing anarchist ideas to a wider audience.

As well as old and new books and pamphlets we have archives including thousands of papers and periodicals, many going back into the 1980s and beyond, and materials internal to the Anarchist Communist movement internationally.

Most aren't even available on-line, and many documents are unique. Some of them we are scanning and making available electronically via our website, starting with a 1964 edition of Anarchy featuring Nottingham. But when you look at a publication such as Bristol's Stuff It, the artefact is important in itself. How can a paper of which every page was hand silk-screened in lurid coloured ink, left over from other print jobs, be scanned in and viewed on a computer screen, without losing a sense of what it was all about?

We also have large holdings from the dynamic DIY Anarcho-Punk fanzine culture of the 1980s, international materials – including some probably not available anywhere else in Britain and huge amounts in Spanish – Anarchist art and fiction, and self-help guides and publications like Counter Information that influenced the nature of working-class resistance as well as reflecting it. We also have extensive runs of the current British and Irish Anarchist press.

Then there is our collection of materials produced specifically by Anarchists in Nottingham in the 1980s and 90s; Nottingham Anarchist News, Spot the Bomb, Police News and The Nottingham Agitator, for example. Material on local groups throughout Britain is an area we really want to specialise in. We already have quite a few relating to the Sheffield scene.

Finally, Anarchism in Nottinghamshire is just one aspect of a long tradition of working class struggle and self-activity in the East Midlands and South Yorkshire area. We've got materials from all sorts of workplace and community struggles, and the Peace and Troops Out movements, all donated by Nottingham activists. One of these is an ex-miner. He promised us a copy of the paper he and his NUM mates used to produce, The Gedling Standard. He said they used to give it out "so the bosses didn't know; underground". We thought he meant in secret, but then we saw it was covered in coal dust!

We think The Sparrows' Nest is a significant resource for the movement. It is also important that we are outside of London, where there is far more available. We hope to attract activists from all over who want to read more about Anarchists and Anarchism to come and use it. It has great potential for academic research too. We know for a fact that most of our back issues and DIY publications aren't available anywhere else publically (although we're pretty picky about who gets to see material internal to the movement).

The space is also being used to host talks, discussions and other events on topics related to Anarchist literature. We've had good feedback already from the movement generally. Freedom Bookshop very generously donated of dozens of titles. The wider Anarchist community of Nottingham has also been really enthusiastic about the project and several non-AFers are heavily involved. We've had far more visitors so far than we actually expected. But this brings us to an interesting issue.

We are based in a house and it isn't at all obvious that it's really a library. We haven't publicised the address very widely at all. What are we afraid of? Well Nottingham AF doesn't exactly have a cosy relationship with the council or the cops, but at some point they'll just have to deal with our existence.

But the Nottinghamshire fash scene being what it is, some parties may be looking to take revenge on whoever they can after the BNP national contacts list was published.

But we do need a controlled way to open up more and more publically. There's an alternative education project starting up in Nottingham. By running some sessions here on radical history we hope to attract some of those same autodidactic workers and other sorts of people, making it easy for them to read about Anarchism in its own words and get involved in the struggle.

Almost all of the books and pamphlets are inventoried now and can be found on our website. We are looking for people to come and see us, donate and give literature. We are still cataloguing like mad so contact us if there's something you are specifically interested in.

Web: thesparrowsnest.org.uk
Email: info@thesparrowsnest.org.uk
Tel. 07913720136 Anarchy in the USA,

By Laura Norder (Sparrow's nest & AF)

US and them

Interview: Iain Mckay talks to Andrew Flood about America, Ireland, and learning lessons

Where did you visit on your tour? Did any groups host events?

I spoke in 44 North American cities scattered across two Canadian provinces and 18 US states.

These were on the east and west coasts and from the east coast across the mid-west as far as Minneapolis-St Paul's.

There were lots of organisations, infoshops and organisations in formation involved on putting on the dates.

Around one third were organised through the North East Federation of Anarchist Communists (NEFAC) while some local groups just organised a meeting in the one city they were active in.

In the vast majority of cases I'd never met any of the organisers, everything was done over email, the entire Florida tour for instance was initated by one student who was on the Crimthinc mailing list and saw an announcement for my tour which was apparently posted there.

He contacted me and then proceeded to contact email addresses he found in Florida and managed to get four dates together that way.

Does there seem to be much interest in libertarian ideas?

Attendance varied from around 60 to around a dozen, perhaps giving a total close to 1,400 people who attended a meeting during the tour.

In quite a few stops it was the first public anarchist meeting organised in quite a while so apart from city size and local politics there would have been a good deal of variation in how experienced people were at putting together and promoting events like these. The people who turned up seemed to be interested but they were rather a small fraction of the local population.

What was the theme of the meeting?

The theme was 'Building a Popular Anarchism in Ireland.' I was telling the story of the growth of the Irish anarchist movement in the period from 1997-2007 and in doing so making an argument for an outward looking, organised movement capable of working in alliances.

Generally there seemed to be a very high level of interest, it was a great help that the subject matter contained loads of interesting anecdotes that reflected a decade of positive anarchist organisation in Ireland.

What is the US movement like from a class-struggle perspective?

Better than I expected. I think on arrival in North America I shared any of the prejudices that you find in the British anarchist movement towards North America, prejudices that are often based on a failure to try and understand conditions there.

I expected a lot of North American anarchists to be liberal idiots but in reality I found was huge numbers of people doing quite solid local organising, in particular when you considered their weak numbers and relative lack of experience.

A good few of the positions that seem odd from Europe make a lot more sense when you can put them in the context of local conditions and North American history.

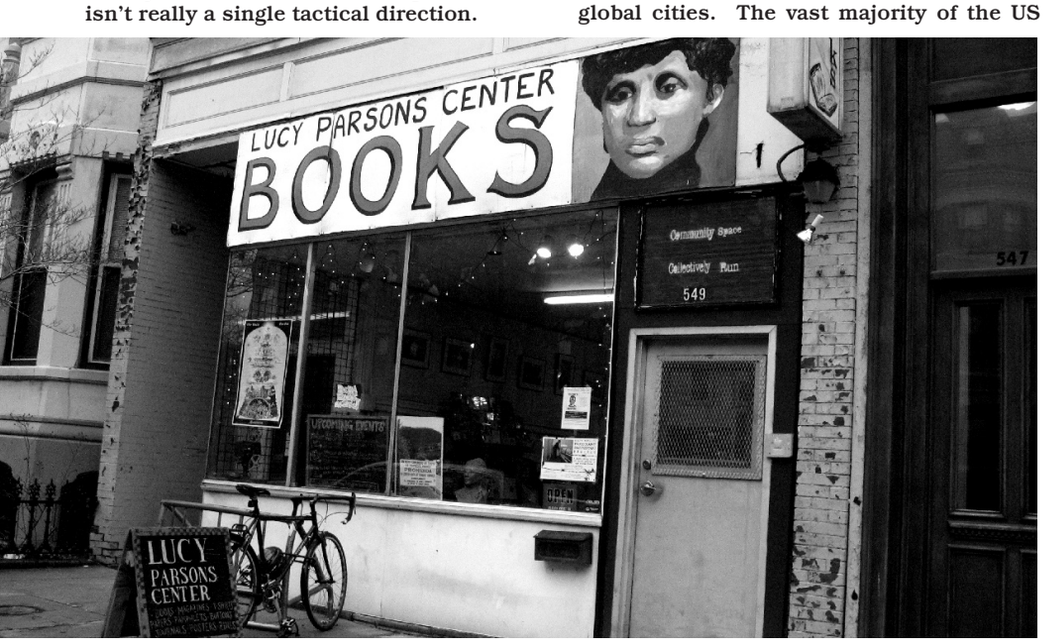
Did anything in particular stand out and impress you in the US?

I think the sheer number of people involved in local projects was very impressive. At a simple level about two thirds of my meetings (about 30 of them) took place in radical social spaces of one form or another. And I probably visited at least another twenty or more. That is a greater level of infrastructure (and the commitment that implies) much more then I had expected to find.

How do the American and European anarchist movements compare?

I'd say the movement in Britain is closer to the movement in North America then either of those movements is with Ireland. Chiefly compared to the number of self-declared anarchists the level of national or regional organisation is very, very weak in North America and Britain in comparison with Ireland.

Beyond that there are people who like riots and people who like workplace organising there just as there are in most places, there isn't really a single tactical direction.



Thriving scene: The Lucy Parsons social centre in Boston

The US and Britain are also very similar in that most anarchists are not part of region wide organisations or often even local organisations.

The region wide groups in reality really only exist as more than isolated individuals in a very small number of cities although they often have a scattering of individual members outside of these.

This means that in terms of struggle the vast majority of activity is around individual anarchists involved in local community, environmental or workplace struggle as militant individuals who happen to be anarchists rather than as part of a collective anarchist effort.

From time to time there are a variety of social / political gatherings at which people can exchange experiences but which apart from the occasional spectacular event like summit protests these don't formulate collective action.

As with Britain the biggest of these are bookfairs but the sheer scale of North America means there is no single equivalent to the London bookfair but rather a range of bookfair and conference events across the continent.

There is no equivalent to the anarchist influenced revolutionary unions on the European mainland. The IWW would like to be that but the reality is that its membership density is less than that of the WSM in Ireland so its more of a network of anti-authoritarian workplace militants that occasionally tries to act as a union when the opportunity arises at a particular location or at a particular time.

There are no also equivalents of the sort of regional anarchist political organisations that are found in some countries that have a real presence across a large number of cities but this is a product of the small size of the movement as well as not talking the organisational question seriously enough.

Did you get much chance to see working class parts of America?

I'd question this question. What exactly would be 'non-working class' America outside of very small strips of the super rich in New York, Miami, LA or the other global cities. The vast majority of the US population is working class so it follows that most of the urban geography is working class, including of those cities already listed. I guess this question may come from the way the US is portrayed in the TV that makes it over here, after all workers are pretty absent from 'Sex & the City' except when they are pouring drinks for or being targeted by the main characters.

Beyond that perhaps this is a question about the industrial working class? A good part of the trip was in cities that would have been associated with large scale industry, particularly those cities in the mid-west, places like Detroit. I saw 8-mile, Detroit seemed to be close enough to that but considerably more run down than at the time of that story.

I've also seen all the episodes of the Wire and that seems like an accurate enough portrayal of life in Baltimore. Miami on the other hand was nothing like what is portrayed in CSS Miami, there is a very narrow strip of really rich folk but behind that, away from the beach are mile after mile or ordinary workers and patches of extreme poverty and deprivation. My New York didn't look much like that of Sex & the City or even friends, but then I was staying in Jersey city.

Did anything stand out and/ or depress you about it?

The acceptance of primitivism as a legitimate part of the anarchist movement and even the left in general. I was amazed for instance to discover that some union locals had sponsored the speaking tour of Derick Jensen whose primitivist writings amount to an argument for mass murder. He was charging in the region of 2000 dollars an appearance in Ontario, it was quite extraordinary to me that unions would spend their members money on such a huckster.

What are the major tendencies in the American movement?

My tour coincided with and fed into a wave of anarchist communist organising across many of the regions I was visiting which meant I got to play some role in the formation process of five or six new organisations. But I wouldn't overstate this, as is true of the North America in general these organisations are tiny in comparison with the population of the areas they operate in. The positive news on the primitivist front is that apart from the couple of celebrity gurus who are very visible on the internet there is very little primitivist organisation anywhere, even in Eugene, Oregon.

I have the general impression that many of the people who might formerly have been primmies had drifted into some form of insurrectional anarchism although again there are almost no organisations outside of a couple of cities. Some of the insurrectionalist stuff is really stupid, taking no account whatsoever of local conditions and acting out a weak-ass version of what is seen on Greek youtube riot porn. But there is nothing uniquely North America there either.

The IWW remains by far the largest network for anti-authoritarians in the US but it didn't really strike me as having any real existence as a union outside of what were pretty small struggles in a couple of cities. Many social anarchists join it as a way of meeting up with like minded folk and of distancing themselves from the nuttier end of the local anarchist scene.

What problems are there for the future growth of anarchism in America?

Internally issues like the high rate of transience which means it's hard to accumulate collective experience in any city as people are always moving in, in particular when organisational problems are encountered.

Related to this is the very low level of intergenerational contact which means the movement today which is mostly under 30, if not 25 doesn't easily benefit from the lessons learned the hard way by the movement in the 60's, 70's and 80's.

Externally the North American cult of the rugged individual and the American dream not only make popular organising difficult but seeps into the anarchist movement like a poison.

Couple this with the historic success of the US state in smashing radical oppositional movements in all their forms and the current high degree of repression of anything that steps over the limited boundaries of protest allowed and you have a very difficult atmosphere in which to build anything that goes beyond lobbying.

The number of police is extraordinary, their constant use against the 'civilian population' is striking, I saw more people being arrested on the streets in the 16 weeks of my tour as I have in nearly 40 years outside North America. And finally in the US in particular there is an extraordinary level of state infiltration and the use of agent provocateurs to tempt fresh young activists into doing stupid stuff that can lead them to very long jail sentences.

What gives you hope for improvement?

Class divisions, although sometimes camouflaged by race are very, very visible in the USA and almost as visible in Canada.

Workers, particularly outside the coastal cities, are being fucked over in a very, very visible way. So 'rugged individualism' aside North America should be fertile ground for class struggle politics, it certainly has been in the past.

Also the left does not really exist, the few far left groups that exist are much smaller than their equivalents in Britain despite the much greater population, they don't really exist outside a few colleges in a few towns. With the exception of Canada there is no social democracy and no viable green party. In short it would not that hard for anarchists to become 'the' opposition.

Internally there is actually a huge amount of individual experience of grassroots organising within the anarchist movement. If you had the emergence of a coherent movement this individual experience could be turned into some pretty powerful collective organisation.

Did things change much in Ireland during your time in the states?

Ha. At the time of writing they certainly have. I left the Celtic Tiger and returned to an economy that has collapsed month after month since my return. Now that is a long story and one that is far from over.

But I first saw the collapse when I arrived in Miami around the start of April, loads of condo skyscrapers hand been abandoned after 20 floors of construction after the banks had stopped loaning money to the developers. Crossing the Atlantic was a bit like getting a flight that was running a little ahead of the sunset, you had seen what was coming.

How do the Irish and British anarchist movements compare?

The Irish movement is smaller both because the island has a fifth of the population and in real terms.

But for its size it's a lot more organised. I would guess there are 3-400 anarchists in Ireland who have some level of activity and 20-30% of these are in one of the two national organisations, mostly in WSM.

I'd guess there would be maybe 4,000 anarchists in Britain but only 4-8% of that number are in national organisations. Anarchism here is also pretty much always class struggle in flavour even if a particular struggle happens to be one around what might be seen as environmentalism.

Has the Irish movement got anything to learn from the UK, and visa versa?

Try to avoid extreme sectarianism damaging the ability to work together, although in reality that is easier to say than to do. On the local level there are loads of things we see and would seek to learn from although the question of what can be transferred to the different conditions here is not always an easy one.

And of course we nicked the idea of doing a bookfair and that has been a strong success, the Dublin one is around a quarter the size of the London one now which is pretty good given the population difference.

WSM was one of the first on the net in the 90s. Do you think that has paid off?

No question about that although really it was an individual rather than an organisational effort up to the late 1990's when the internet really started to take off.

I worked in IT from the early 1990's and basically just grabbed electronic versions of anything we printed, for most of that time I think the others were inclined to view my online activity as a rather odd and nerdish hobby.

Nowadays we are working on lots of ways of developing a collective online presence and probably a dozen members are actively involved in that in a regular way, in the last months we've been putting a lot of video and audio online as well as working on social networking sites like Facebook.

How has the internet changed how anarchists get their message across?

Obviously the net is now far more important than the scattering of local radical bookshops used to be. But there are negatives to that, people are probably reading a lot fewer book length texts for instance.

The growth of indymedia here in Ireland, which we played quite a central part in, was extremely useful to us. It got our ideas out to huge numbers of people who may never have visited our own site.

And it generated a very useful debate, particularly at the time of the 2002/3 anti-war movement.

But the internet has changed a lot in the last few years, the indymedia model may well be on the way out and we need to keep looking at how we can turn aspects of the new stuff to our use.

Anarchists are nervous about stuff like Facebook, and rightly so, but remember the origins of the internet lie in the military wanting a common and control system that could survive a major nuclear war, if that can be used for good anything can!

Can you tell us something about your latest project, Anarchist Writers?

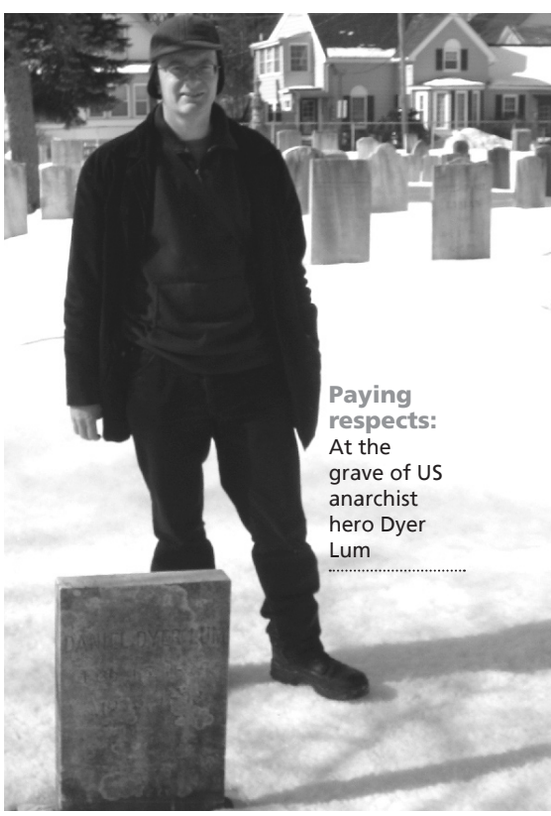
(anarchism.pageabode.com)

I'm terrible at managing to file anything I write so for years I've used the internet to store my public writings – often as not I use google to locate old stuff. For years this was on a variety of manually edited pages but these are a lot of work to maintain. When I moved to Canada and became involved in Common Cause we needed a web site and from the start we wanted to make this a collective project. So along with someone else I forced myself to learn enough Drupal (an opensource CMS system) to put it together.

When that was done I realised that creating a new site would be an easy way not only to store my own material but that it would also be almost no extra work to create accounts on it for other anarchists to do the same for theirs.

Then when I was organising the tour I realised creating a blog on the site would be an easy way for people (including my parents) to keep track of how things were going. I found I quite liked the freedom of blogging (as people don't expect the same level of editorial care as they do with articles) so I've kept going.

As of now I'm starting to expand the number of people with accounts on the site, basically through offering accounts to people I know and those who agree with the Anarkismo statement. So over time the site may build to quite a useful resource in its own right. But it also functions as training for me,



Paying respects: At the grave of US anarchist hero Dyer Lum

I may work in IT but I've never done any formal training outside of the equivalent of a YTS course, I tend to learn new stuff by starting off a project that I think should exist and pick things up as I go along.

Any final comments or suggestions?

We'll build a successful movement by always looking outwards, taking risks and trying new things. Traditionalism and too much concern with purity are a recipe for inaction.

By Iain Mckay

Linking today's Islamic terrors to anarchism

Analysis: How the establishment have resurrected old spectres for new problems

Amongst the many explanations of Al Qaeda and Islamist violence since 9/11, one arguably stands out. Put simply it is the suggestion that Al Qaeda's violence is something outside of Islam per se, indeed outside of Islamic fundamentalism. In searching for historical precedents, writers, journalists and politicians have begun to compare Al Qaeda to Anarchist organisations, and in particular the wave of violence that was associated with Anarchism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Between 1892 and 1901, Anarchists assassinated the Heads of State in France, the United States and Italy, as well as killing the Prime Minister of Spain and the Empress of Austria.

The years during and immediately after the First World War also saw a significant wave of violence in the United States, mostly associated with Anarchist émigrés from Europe. At the centre of this agitation was Italian émigré Luigi Galleani, who combined Kropotkin's theories of mutual aid with a commitment to revolutionary violence. He and his followers fought dirty – for example in 1916 Anarchist chef Nestor Dondoglio poisoned the soup at an Archbishops banquet, lacing it with arsenic.

What was particularly noticeable here was the innovative nature of the violence – at the end of April 1919 30 letter bombs were posted to figures in the American establishment, timed to arrive on Mayday. This was followed by a bomb attack on the home of the Attorney General, and in September 1920 the first ever car bomb, planted by Anarchists at the New York Stock Exchange. Thirty-three people were killed, whilst the likely bomber, an Italian Anarchist called Mario Buda, quietly made his way back to Italy. Terrorism therefore, has been crossing borders for some time.

Let us now consider some of the writers who, alongside The Economist of 18 August 2005 argue "For jihadist, read anarchist".

Tariq Ali

Laying the blame for the 7/7 attacks in London firmly at the door of Tony Blair and his decision to join the US led invasion of Iraq, Ali wrote "Why They Happened". He comments:

"Ever since 9/11, I have been arguing that the 'war against terror' is immoral and counterproductive. It sanctions the use of state terror – bombing raids, tortures, countless civilian deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq – against Islamo-anarchists whose numbers are small, but whose reach is deadly"

Ali adds that increased security measures and new laws are not the answer "If anything they will push young Muslims in the direction of mindless violence."

Lord Desai

A British Muslim Labour peer, Desai argues that Islamism is a political ideology quite distinct from religion. He comments:

"the modern Islamist terrorist is a descendant of the anarchist, except that there is a central 'office', al-Qaeda, which either controls them or at least inspires them"

John Gray

One of the UK's most eminent academics, Gray's "Al Qaeda and What It Means To be Modern" rejects the view that Al Qaeda wishes to turn the clock back to the sixth century, but instead places it as a modern political movement, that seeks to use violence to alter the human condition.

He sees the Anarchist era of propaganda by deed as a precursor to radical Islam, compares Bin Laden to the nineteenth century Russian Anarchist Nechaev and comments: "Al Qaeda's peculiar hybrid of theocracy and anarchy is a by-product of Western radical thought"

Dr Hasan-Askari Rizvi

A Pakistani political and defence analyst, writing in July 2008 about the return of the Taliban to prominence in the region:

"It is a wrong assumption that the Taliban will again become friendly to Pakistan if it gives up its support to the US led war on terrorism. The Taliban have an anarchist agenda that aims at dismantling the Pakistani state"

Graham Stewart

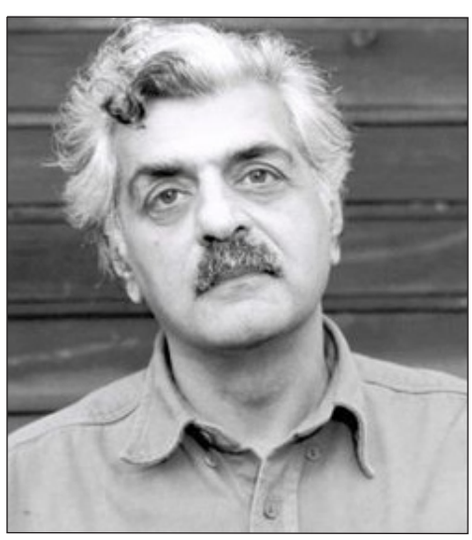
A historian who served for a while as assistant to the late Conservative MP Alan Clark, Stewart wrote an interesting comparison piece "Al Qaeda, Victorian Style" in The Times, shortly after 7/7. He commented:

"The militant atheists of late 19th century Europe would have found little common intellectual ground with 21st century Islamists. Yet both were ascetic movements whose followers were repelled by the decadence and thoughtless exploitation they believed inherent in Western bourgeois society. Both movements turned away from the world as it was in favour of an idealised world as it might be. Like the Islamists, the anarchists rejected the political compromises of the democratic process. The more desperate among them put their point across with dynamite instead".

Some Criticisms

What perhaps characterises the above quotes is their brevity. In some cases (Tariq Ali and Dr Rizvi) the information provided is taken as a given, and the reader broadly asked to take their word for it. When I entered into correspondence with Tim Pendry about his article, he explained:

"The comments were not based on any particular report or analysis, just the commonsense assessment of someone who has read fairly widely in late nineteenth century intellectual and political revolt."



Stings like a bee: Ex-Trotskyist Tariq Ali coined the term 'Islamo-Anarchism'

Why though are writers comparing such disparate phenomena? It is hard to consider two ideologies as different, ostensibly, as Anarchism and Islamism. Anarchism is based on the concept of life without rulers, whilst the core of Islam is submission to an authority – Allah. Anarchists are opposed to nation states, whilst Al Qaeda look to build a caliphate – a vast territory where Muslims will live under the rule of the Qu'ran, having swept away corrupt Muslim rulers. If anything that resembles an empire more than a nation state!

In the meantime Bin Laden and co have happily worked with various nation states – the US back in the 1980s, and at different times since then Sudan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan. That these relationships have often soured over time should not distract us from the fact they

happened – and new ones may well be forged in the future.

When Tariq Ali was pressed by those critical of his invention of the term "Islamo-Anarchism" he responded with the curious answer that "I coined Islamo-Anarchism to counter the Islamo-Fascism of American and Brit neo-Cons." The Neo-Cons must be shaking in their boots at that one Tariq!

Whilst accepting that the term Islamo-Fascism is hardly politically sophisticated, (although it is not just Neo-Cons who have used it) it is difficult to see how Ali's counter terminology advances any cause, indeed it appears to be based more on petulance than anything else.

Secondly human beings often rely on comparisons with known objects or phenomena to categorise things that are new or they do not understand. If someone associates bombings with Anarchism, or anti-semitism and prejudice with Fascism, it is perhaps not too long a journey to using terms such as Islamo-Anarchism or Islamo-Fascism.

However, if that simplistic approach is all that lies behind such terminology, it is unlikely to stand up to rigorous analysis. Indeed Anarchists have arguably killed far fewer people in pursuit of their goals than any other ideology – look at the historical record of liberal democracy, Zionism or Irish Republicanism to take three examples.

What could be more convenient, to a British Muslim peer such as Lord Desai, if deadly Islamist violence in the UK actually has nothing to do with Islam at all?

James L Gelvin Steps Forward

Only in 2008 did a writer try to build a substantive case comparing Islamist terrorism and Anarchist terrorism - James L Gelvin, of the University College Los Angles (UCLA.) An expert on the Middle East, Gelvin fired his first shot in 2007, seeing five core areas where Al Qaeda and Anarchists overlapped. He argued Al Qaeda:

- Places action over ideology
- Has a single minded focus on resistance
- Lacks programmatic goals
- Pursues violence for its own sake
- Is de-centralised with semi-autonomous cells.

Thus "all these factors align Al Qaeda with a type of movement that historically has had nothing to do with Islamism at all: Anarchism".

In 2008 Gelvin attempted to flesh out his arguments in the academic journal Terrorism and Political Violence. Here he stresses that Anarchism makes the claim to be defensive in nature, as does Al Qaeda, whose rhetoric is dominated by the perceived injustices of the "Zionist-Crusader Alliance".

Adopting such a position is hardly unusual however – anyone who visited Northern Ireland during the troubles will have observed the frequency with which Ulster Loyalists referred to themselves as "under siege" or groups like the Ulster Defence Association (note the name) characterised themselves as a purely reactive force. Even on the international political stage, actions such as the invasion of Iraq were characterised as being defensive.

Gelvin sees both Al Qaeda and Anarchists as attacking the wellspring of their subjugation – the state. Bin Laden's deputy, Aymaan Al-Zawahiri states openly that Muslims are a single nation, whilst Al Qaeda spokesman Louis Attiya Allah criticises nation states as a Western invention, calling for their destruction.

Writing before the 2008-9 Israeli attacks on Gaza, Gelvin also sees al-Zawahiri as at times lukewarm about Hamas, and their interpretation of the Palestinian struggle. Indeed the quotes Gelvin selects of al-Zawahiri insisting that the Palestinian struggle is not a nationalist one, but for one for shariah, show the Al Qaeda number two engaged in some rather unconvincing verbiage.

Whilst this is all very interesting, in what way does it prove that Anarchism and Al Qaeda are analogous or that they are unique in tackling the 'wellspring of subjugation'? Indeed it is tempting to ask why any revolutionary would attempt to attack anything other than the well-spring of subjugation?

Next is the proposition that both Anarchists and Al Qaeda's worldview are based on an ideal counter-community.

"In the Al Qaeda imagination it seems that the caliphate might be defined as a territorial expanse freed from the constraints of the nation state system and ordained and administered according to the precepts of Islamic law."

Here, he sees Anarchists and Islamists facing the same core problem, the difficulty in producing "a governance cum disciplinary mechanism from a vantage point located within the existing nation state system".

Gelvin is on weak ground in arguing that Al Qaeda's vision of counter-community remains ambiguous. On the contrary we have a view from those who have spent time in Al Qaeda controlled territory such as their camps – the journalist Abdel Bari Atwan, or with regard to their jihadist training facilities the Islamist turned defector Omar Nasiri. They tell us much about how Al Qaeda members go about their business and live their daily lives.

Finally we have our knowledge of the type of society Al Qaeda was involved with building in Taliban controlled Afghanistan. Whilst some difficulties and differences occurred between Al Qaeda and the Taleban, evidence of Al Qaeda dissenting substantially from that experiment in actually existing shariah is sparse.

More substantially, Gelvin sees Anarchists as adopting an instrumental approach to terrorism. The more outrageous and spectacular the better – the more it would embolden revolutionaries and diminish the control of counter revolutionaries. Here perhaps Gelvin is at his weakest. If you view terrorism as a method, not as part of an ideology or the basis of an ideology under consideration, it is not surprising that you can find similarities between the intentions of terrorists.

Terrorists of a whole range of political and religious backgrounds – from Islamist to nationalist to fascist – may wish to kill the President of the United States. But does that tell us anything about them other than they are willing to use violence?

Conclusions

Historical parallels can be found between Anarchist and Islamist violence. A desire to respond to injustice, (whether real or perceived) and a willingness to use deadly violence are observable. Far greater differences however exist – most obviously in the type of future society envisaged, who violence is aimed at, or indeed in working relations with existing nation states. James L Gelvin not only fails to prove his case, but puts forward so many general points that they could be used to prove – or disprove – just about anything.

That Anarchists broadly stopped using terrorism as a method means that researchers and analysts will continue to return to it when looking for indications as to the nature of future trends in Al Qaeda and Islamist violence. It is to be hoped that one or two of those who stop by, may actually know a little bit about one or other of the ideologies under discussion.

■ *Paul Stott is currently working on a PhD looking at the similarities (and many more differences) between Anarchist and Islamist terrorism. He can be contacted via his website paulstott.typepad.com*

By Paul Stott

Islamist Mob: A demonstration against the Danish Mohammed cartoons, February 2006

Heating up the

It is not overstating the case to say that without the Legal Defence and Monitoring Group, a large number of people who disagreed with the policies of Her Majesty's Government are walking free today who might otherwise be serving a lengthy stretch.

The group have for over a decade been at the forefront of street protest in the UK, making sure that when people exercise their right to free speech, they aren't simply spirited away to the extensive dungeons of democracy's cradle.

Andy Meinke, a tall and focused character, has been involved in the organisation in London since 1998, and is part of a half-dozen strong group of legal observers in the capital, with a much larger group of casuals supporting them.

Over the last ten years, while the basics have not changed significantly,

Andy has seen an evolution of the policing of dissent as police techniques, and law use, tighten.

He said: "Fundamentally British public order policing tactics have remained unchanged since 1974 and the Red Lion Square riot, where a student called Kevin Gately was killed by police, who had an inquiry and were duly exonerated by Lord Scarman. Out of this came the plan not to chase through the streets whacking people.

"Since then they have been practicing an ever-tightening form of containment, very different from the tactics used elsewhere in Europe, which is designed to disperse crowds.

"It's based on a psychological theory of a hierarchy of needs, whereby if people are kept long enough and bored their desire to go home, eat and go to the loo will outweigh their rage at civil liberties being breached.

"What we've seen in the last ten years though is much more common and longer-term kettles, or bubbles as they're sometimes called, designed to hold demonstrators in a cordon of police before eventual release, of up to seven-and-a-half hours – like Oxford Circus in 2001 - and a complete failure by the activist movement to find a way around it."

The differences between such tactics and older styles of policing, which are still used on the continent, came to the fore in Gleneagles 2005 in Scotland and Heiligendamm 2007 in Germany, when the anti-G8 demonstrations came to town. The styles of policing, and approaches from activists, were very different.

"Comparing the German and Scottish G8s, the activist movement there is a lot stronger in Germany which made a difference, and they are more professional in their approach to dealing with police, which we are not.

"The closest we have had tactically were the Wombles group in the UK. They were put under a lot of police attention when they started to take this more tactical approach, members were followed home, intimidated etc.

Containment: Police tactics in the UK have revolved around the kettle, where police first contain protestors behind a cordon of police, then gradually tighten the line.

"More generally, part of the culture in our movement is a suspicion of paramilitary tactics, which has good political reasoning but does hamstring us.

"The tactics from British police see almost no use of tear gas except in violent circumstances – it has only been used once in Toxteth, 1981. They don't use water cannon.

@There are plans to use acoustic devices but it's mostly just batons, which while it is dangerous looks less so and even this is becoming less frequent, extendable batons mean you can hurt people without causing brain damage, horses are used much more widely to intimidate.

"It's a much more psychological approach, because the number of riot-trained police is actually very low.

"For example the Met have 3,500 out of 30,000 who are riot trained and the others aren't allowed to even be there because of health and safety laws.

"Even a small demo of 35,000 people vastly outnumbers them so it has to be mostly psychological."

But smart policing has not been the only tool hitting effectiveness in demonstrations.

A raft of new laws have been highly noticeable in the last few years attached to anti-terror legislation.

Andy believes that in many cases the practical danger of some of these has been overstated, with less notorious laws actually doing more damage in many cases.

"As with so often, the high-profile laws, like the Terrorism Act stuff and section 58a (anti-photography) are less damaging than some of the more seemingly innocuous ones, for example Section 50 of the Police Reform Act gives them the power to demand the name and address of people who they believe to be acting in an antisocial manner.

"That was designed to be used against juvenile delinquents but is now routinely used to obtain the names of protestors.

"It's an example of a law that has not been

kettle question

Interview: Rob Ray talks to demonstrations legal observer Andy Meinke about police tactics today

tested in the courts and for the majority of the people who have been arrested over it the case has been dropped, but it has brought a lot of results for the police because the psychological aspect of it is, according to the European Court of Human Rights, a 'chilling effect on the right to protest'.

"The so-called photography law that has been brought in really won't stop people photographing police as far as the higher courts are concerned, but loads of people will be stopped by police and intimidated out of doing so.

"Another feature is there are so many laws that people find it hard to keep up. The police themselves often can't follow the amount of laws.

"To become a sergeant you have to pass a multiple-choice test on the laws as they stand, for which until 2004 they had a 75% pass rate. Since then they have refused to say what the pass rate is."

Surveillance, in the form of both CCTV cameras and the hated Forward Intelligence Team – a police squad dedicated to profiling activists – has also been a major difficulty in building any kind of movement capable of taking on police lines.

"The camera system is just overwhelming. To avoid it you'd have to just about mask up when you leave your home and keep it on until you go to work on Monday morning.

"And it makes it impossible for anyone who is regularly active to not be known.

"For the last eight years I've been regularly followed by Forward Intelligence Teams, who know me by name on any major demo I've been on, and the same is true for upwards of 50 regular activists in London.

"It's strange how it gets to you after a few days of it. During the European Social Forum they followed me into the Royal Courts of Justice when I went in for a case and stood outside the courtroom until I left.

"When we were going they arrested Helen Steele (who became internationally famous in 1997 as one of two people involved in the McLibel trial) for jamming a revolving door and obstructing police in following me. She was acquitted."

As is the case with many long term activists, Andy is unsure as to how public protest can progress against today's police tactics. "Legally, the House of Lords has said this year that kettling people is perfectly legal, for up to 71/2 hours – the Oxford Circus test case."

By Rob Ray (Freedom Press)

Blocked: The activist movement is yet to find an effective way of beating modern police lines

Calling out the cops

As some 7,000 people protested against the G20 in the City of London one person died. Ian Tomlinson 47, who worked at a newsagent nearby collapsed and died in the early evening on his way home from work.

The initial Police account that they were attacked by the crowd while trying to give first aid to Mr. Tomlinson is completely false. In fact numerous witnesses have come forward with exactly the opposite account, police pushed away protesters attempting to help him. Secondly it is now established that police knocked Mr. Tomlinson to the ground ten minutes before he collapsed causing him a head injury.

He didn't die from a heart attack despite IPCC claims. They tried to pull the video showing his assault from websites. They used London police to look into their own charges. They failed to interview the officer concerned or discipline him until pushed.

Experience from the 2005 shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes, back to the last demonstration deaths – Blair Peach in Southall 1979 and Kevin Gately at Red Lion Square in 1974 suggests the shoddy coverup will be followed by an implausible whitewash.

Meanwhile, the Legal Defence and Monitoring Group ask for anybody who witnessed someone being arrested (even if you don't know who they are) please write a detailed account on the incident as soon as possible and forward it to LDMG email below or post: Legal Defence and Monitoring Group BM Box HAVEN, London, WC1N 3XX. LDMG meets at Freedom on the first Tuesday of the month 7pm.

The Climate Camp Legal Group have also got a call out for legally aided people (low income – approx less than £14,000 with low savings) who might be willing to be parties to a judicial review case on the searches and who: suffered an excessive number of searches under section 1 and section 60. Also people threatened with section 50 (antisocial behaviour), or immigration offences to obtain their name and address or people threatened with arrest for having stolen a mobile phone. Please contact legal@climatecamp.org.uk

LDMG
Legal defence & monitoring group

Andy Meinke is active with the Legal Defence and Monitoring Group, which attends demonstrations to prive witness in potential court cases.

phreak.co.uk/ldmg/index.php, email: ldmgmail@yahoo.co.uk

Understanding

In focus: The Anarchist Federation bring their analysis to the table of why capitalism is broken. Again.

The current economic crisis is not an unexpected blip in the normal smooth workings of capitalism. Throughout its history capitalism has been subject to cycles of growth and decline. For the working class, even in so-called growth periods, the benefits are largely felt by the better-off, with just a small portion of the benefits trickling down to people at the bottom of the class hierarchy.

Marx, despite his many grievous errors, developed an astute analysis of how capitalism worked. He demonstrated why capitalism was prone to economic cycles. Capitalism needs to grow in order to survive. It does this by finding new markets and producing new products. For example, the development of new technology – computers, digital products, mobile phones etc- provided a huge area of growth over the past couple of decades.

However, there is a limit on how long the pace of growth in demand can continue. Though people will continue to replace current models for new ones, the pace of growth will diminish. This will put downward pressures on profits. There is also another contradiction in capitalism. Growth is limited by ability of the working class to buy the products of their labour. Capitalists seeking maximum profits will keep wages as low as they can get away with, limiting the amount that workers can spend. These two factors together mean that over time there will be a tendency for profits to fall, leading to businesses failing, attacks on wages and a general downward spiral.

Capitalism finds ways of keeping the growth period growing for as long as possible. The recent crisis is the result of a particular set of circumstances that have taken shape since WWII. Firstly, finance capital has emerged as an autonomous sector.

Originally, the banking system was firmly tied to the production of real products in manufacturing. It existed to facilitate the smooth operation of manufacturing industry. Now finance capital has created its own 'products' – various stocks, bonds, securities, futures, currencies etc - that have a very indirect relationship to any actual underlying production. This 'fictitious capital' is treated as 'real' and trading takes place on a global level, with unfathomable sums of money moving around the world.

There are enormous profits to be made as long as there is confidence that the system will continue. The overall effect on the global economy as a result of the expansion of finance capital is that there has been an increase in debt (and so the money supply), making everyone, including the working class, believe that they are better off -- in the case of the working class, by supplementing often stagnant or declining real wages with borrowed money. It is the fact that modern capitalism is based so much on psychology that makes it so vulnerable.

Secondly, capitalism has shed its border constraints and is now fully global. It is not just the finance system but trade, production, and even labour, to an extent, which are transcending national boundaries. This means that when there are problems in one part of the world they will be felt everywhere. This makes it very difficult for governments to control what is happening, hence the need for global summits such as the recent G20.

Hate figure: Fred "The Shred" Goodwin

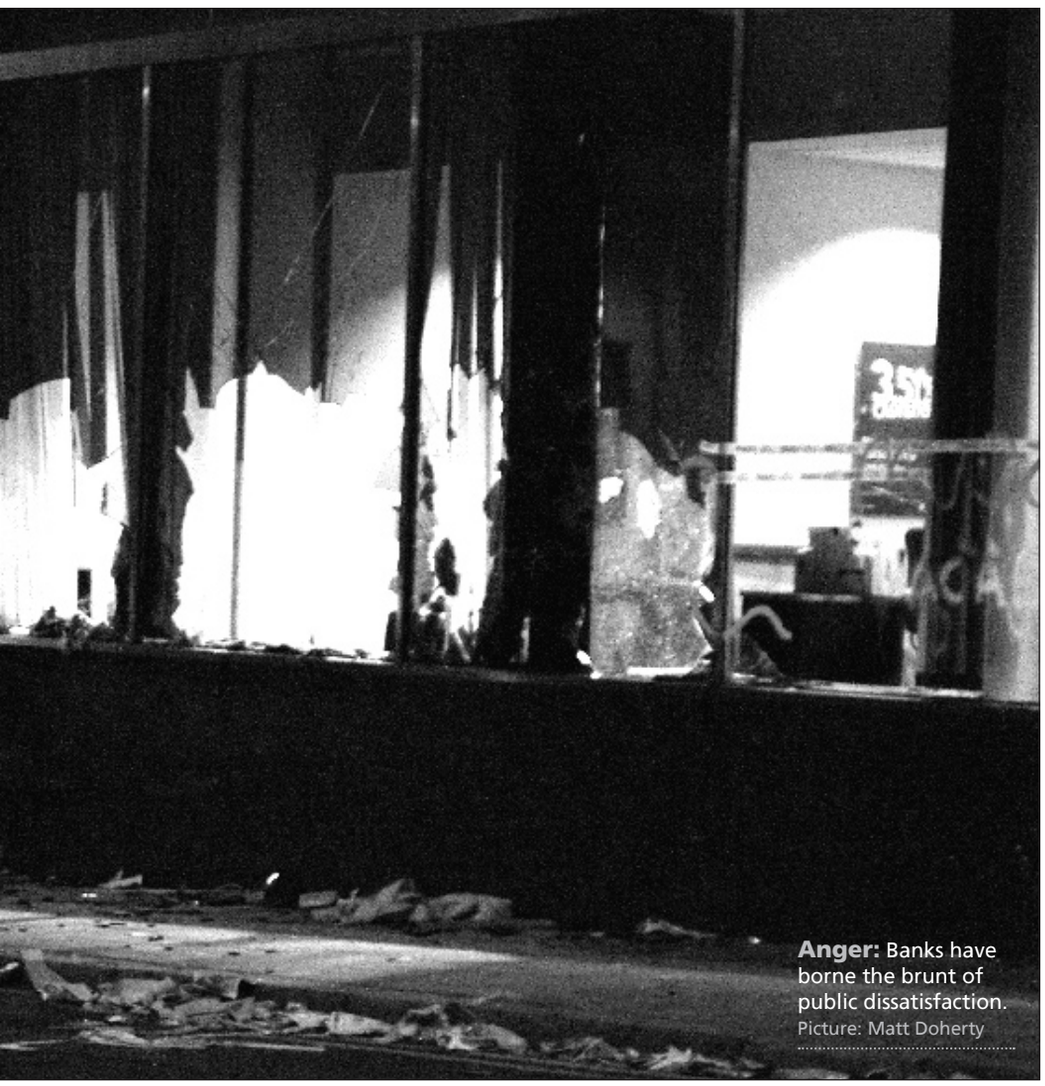
Background to current crisis

The current crisis can be traced to several developments over the past two decades, with the housing market at the centre. Housing is a special product because it is

an expensive necessity, making up a large proportion of people's expenditure, both as mortgages and rents. While people can easily cut back on foreign holidays or wait a few years to trade in the car, housing is something people need to continue to pay for and it is difficult to 'downsize'. The increase in demand for housing, and the consequences of this, lie at the core of the origins of the crisis. It is therefore important to explain why there has been such an increase in demand.

With the continuing rise in population, there is a continual demand for new homes. Populations are growing at an increasing rate, creating a huge new demand for places to live. In addition, the ideology of home ownership has spread to all sections of the population. People do not want to live with their relatives or squeeze into tiny flats. The ideal is a house with a garden, and plenty of room for the children. The desire to own a home has often been forced on people, with landlords, including councils, taking advantage of increased in demand by raising rents. At one point getting a mortgage was a cheaper option than renting for many working class people. The sale of council

the crisis today



Anger: Banks have borne the brunt of public dissatisfaction. Picture: Matt Doherty

homes was eagerly taken up by tenants who saw their chance of getting onto the property ladder.

The events of September 11th also fuelled demand for houses as an investment. With the stock market so volatile and house prices and rents rising, property investment seemed a guaranteed way of making money. It wasn't just the better-off who did this, but also working class people who already had one home. The 'buy to let' market mushroomed.

However, it is the role of the financial system in all of this that lies at the root of the crisis.

As a result of the factors discussed above, banks and mortgage brokers in the US stepped up their lending. However, it was not the traditional housing market that would bring the best returns because interest rates were low. Many firms looked for ways of selling mortgages at higher rates of interest. They found their target in the home ownership aspirations of the lower working class. This became known as the 'sub-prime' market.

Firms sprung up all over but mainly in California, Las Vegas, Florida and some of the rust belt states like Michigan and Ohio. In Las Vegas, all sorts of people were moonlighting from their jobs as waitresses and card dealers in order to become 'mortgage brokers'. The market was completely unregulated.

Daily Mail economic editor Alex Brummer, not known for his left-wing views, in his book The Crunch: How greed and incompetence sparked the credit crisis, documents the full horror of the lengths mortgage brokers and banks would go in order to sell debt to those who clearly couldn't afford it.

Mortgage brokers put together packages that lured people in, with hidden clauses about higher rates of interest. They often didn't ask to see any evidence of ability to pay and according to Brummer, 40% of the loans were these 'liar' loans. The mortgage brokers didn't worry about this because with rising house prices, they could always repossess and make money if the person defaulted.

However, if this was all that happened, then despite the dire effects on those that got sucked in, the problem would have been relatively self-contained. It is what they mortgage brokers and banks did with these debts that have caused the repercussions to be felt all around the world.

The term used to describe what they did is known as 'securitisation'. Mortgage brokers would not hold on to the debt or IOU. They would 'package up' the debt with other debts and sell it to a bigger bank or investment company. This new package, or security, often came with a high guarantee rating because the bad debt was disguised and mixed in with good risk debts. This gave the mortgage broker more money to keep lending. Meanwhile, the bank that now owned this new security might also sell this on., making the whole financial system vulnerable.

In Britain, the situation was not as extreme, but the housing market and the lending practices mirrored that in the US. People of all social classes aspired to own their own home. With wages as low as they are, even for professional people like teachers, many people had difficulty raising the needed cash for a deposit.

With house prices rocketing, two and a half times annual salary (the traditional lending terms) was not high enough to buy anything but a cupboard. In order to attract these people, building societies and banks offered new lending terms that often required no deposit with a 100% mortgage.

Northern Rock was the most aggressive firm in its effort to attract new customers. They offered a 'Together Loan' which put a person's personal debt together with the mortgage in one package. The resulting loan was often 125% of the values of the property. Like in the US, mortgage providers were confident that they were not taking any serious risks because they assumed house prices would continue to rise. They also got practiced securitisation and sold on the housing debts to larger banks. Northern Rock was one of the main firms to carry out this practice and was completely dependent on the wider financial market to continue to provide them with funds.

The increase in house prices and home ownership is the single most important factor in fuelling the consumer boom of the last decades. However, another aspect of the banking system is crucial in making such a consumer boom possible. As discussed above, capitalism can only grow if it manages to increase demand. This demand is limited by wages and finding new consumers. The situation of widespread home ownership, together with rising house prices, provided an ideal way of increasing demand without increasing wages; profits soared and the government complacently congratulated itself for the high economic growth rates. Why was this possible?

Firstly, buying a home usually means that people will spend money on 'doing it up'. Immediately demand goes up for building workers, electricians etc. and

the various DIY products as well as new furniture and other fittingss. Employment goes up in these sectors, further fuelling consumer demand as these workers are better off. However, this spending would not have been possible, given the low incomes people are on, if it wasn't for another aspect of the banking system: personal loans and credit cards.

When people buy a house, they immediately feel more secure, especially if house prices are rising. They think that they are actually better off because they have 'made' money each time the value of their property goes up. As a result, they are willing to spend more money. Since they don't actually have the money, they need to borrow money or use the credit card, which they are willing to do because of the confidence they have as a result of being a home owner.

The banks 'conveniently' stepped in to satisfy the demand for credit. Consumers who 'owned' their home were the targets of loan and credit card offers. It helped that interest rates for borrowing were relatively low. The logic behind their generosity was obvious; if the consumer couldn't keep up the payments, the bank could always repossess.

The more people spent, the more jobs were created in retail and the more the economy grew. Workers from all over Europe were attracted by the need for more skilled labour in the building industry. Their presence further increased demand for goods and services and also increased demand for rented accommodation.

As people became better off, many sought to increase their wealth even more by entering the 'buy-to-let' market. Whole tower blocks have been built with the 'investor' in mind. Even many workers, especially those working in the building trade, had money to spare. They already owned a home; what better investment than a second home in Spain or a flat in an inner city area that they could do up themselves and then rent out?

The situation in the banking system could continue as long as 'liquidity' was maintained – as long as banks were willing to keep the money moving. If anyone decided to call in the debt, then problems would begin. This is what happened.

The downward spiral began in the US when borrowers began to default on their loans. As bad debts increased, there were fewer loans made. In addition, those had their houses repossessed wouldn't be consuming much anymore.

Alan Greenspan, the then-head of the US Federal reserve, warned of problems back in 2005. He said investors were making a mistake if they thought house prices would continue to rise and that interest rates would remain low. He had dropped the interest rates after September 11 in order to keep the economy going.

When he returned the interest rates to what was considered normal, according to Brummer it was an "arrow at the housing market". The demand for houses stalled. More homes were repossessed and this hit demand for other goods and services. The economy began a downward spiral.

However, mortgage brokers and bankers did not cut back on their attempts to lend money and the market in mortgage-based securities continued within the financial sector. Both in the US and Britain all the major banks held varying amounts of these dodgy securities.

The first bank to admit that this might be a problem was the HSBC in 2007. It had taken over a mortgage company in the US and had large investments in the mortgage securities market. More and more banks realised that they were going to make losses in this area and cut back on the buying of securities from mortgage brokers. The mortgage brokers were then unable to raise any new money to cover all the bad debts they were now facing.

House prices were falling so repossession didn't help them much and they had to cut back on their operations, with some declaring bankruptcy.

Due to the global nature of markets, Britain, which has always been closely linked with the US economy, felt the repercussions, as did the rest of Europe to some extent. Globally there was a massive loss of confidence in the banking system itself because of the increased realisation that they were all holding bad debts. If they were holding bad debts then they assumed other banks would be and the system froze; no bank wanted to loan to any other bank, something that is necessary to keep money flowing around the system.

Economic key: The financial centres of London supplied the housing boom with credit

In Britain it was Northern Rock that spearheaded the collapse as it was the most implicated in high risk mortgages and relied entirely on borrowing money from other banks to keep it going. When no bank wanted to lend any more money, it was in trouble and the result was the queues outside the bank branches that we witnessed on the news.

But this soon spread as other banks admitted they had a large portion of their assets in these securities that were becoming rapidly worthless. And like in the US, interest rates had risen which increased the cost of mortgages. There was a sharp increase in repossessions and subsequently a decline in demand for other goods and services. House prices began to fall, reversing the process of before. People felt they were less well-off, cut back on spending which led to job losses in the retail sector. Banks were reluctant to lend money to anyone is this climate, trying to stem the fall in profits.

Britain is more affected by the whole financial crisis than other European countries for several reasons. The economy is heavily reliant on imports of manufactured goods and food. The increase in food prices thus hit more than prices, but also the balance of payments which was already in heavy deficit.

The main way Britain earns foreign exchange is through the export of oil and people investing in the City and Canary Wharf. Up to 30% of the economy is based around financial services. With the upset in the financial markets, less money was coming into Britain, causing further problems and hitting the value of the pound. As the pound decreased in value the price of necessary imports rose even more, meaning that people had to watch their spending even more. Rising prices was also one of the main reasons interest rates had been raised.

Throughout 2008 the rot spread and the government debated what to do. In the end it followed the lead of the US and the EU and lowered interest rates and pumped money into the economy. Unimaginable amounts of money- billions of pounds- have been put into the financial system, much of it used to help the banks write off their bad debts.

The bubble has burst- all the money that people thought was there has proved to be an illusion and has simply disappeared. To keep things where they are, governments have chosen to create that money again by going into debt itself. The whole strategy is designed to maintain the status quo. They want to get people spending by encouraging them to get in debt again. They want banks to keep businesses going. However, this hasn't happened.

What is most despicable is the way that the top people in the financial system continue now to pay themselves massive salaries, despite the fact that the whole mess was due, according to Brummer, "to their own greed and incompetence". Applegarth, the man who headed Northern Rock, may have left in disgrace but he has retired a rich man. Whilst all the problems were going on in his company, he sold his own shares and netted 2.7 million.

The situation can only get worse. North Sea oil is set to run out within a decade and will then be a net importer of oil. The City and Canary Wharf, having attracted the

biggest banks and investment companies from all over the world as a result of the deregulation of finance markets by Thatcher in the 1980s, is clearly at risk of complete collapse.

This can be seen in the drop in the value of the pound. Britain is no longer a place anyone wants to invest in. Job losses have already begun in the City and Canary Wharf, further reducing demand for goods and services, including housing. The few manufacturing industries that Britain has left are struggling to survive.

The government has officially announced that we are in a recession, optimistically forecasting that this will last until the end of 2009. However, there is no justification for this optimism. If Britain isn't actually producing any real products and is going to lose the demand for its only two big products – oil and financial services, then what can economic growth actually be based on? They are willing to give massive amounts of money to the banks, but a pittance to the unemployed and all public sector wage increases have been paltry. Without raising people' income, not just the rich but the majority of people, the working class, how can the economy get off the ground again?

They seem to be relying on working class people being willing to get into debt but not asking for any wage increases. This is seen in the underlying messages in the mass media form bosses and government about the need for sacrifices. This attitude is reflected in the trade unions. The NUT told its members that it needed to accept the low wage increase because of the 'credit crunch'. Small businesses are in the same situation. They are suffering because of lack of demand.

This economic crisis shows starkly what capitalism is and always has been about: the enrichment of a few at the expense of the many. No one in the financial sector will actually suffer. They have already amassed enough wealth to keep them going. Salaries will continue to be high and bonuses, despite the disaster created by the bankers, will continue to be paid, even if they manage to hide it better. Meanwhile, the working class is bearing the brunt of the crisis. It is difficult to know what to argue as anarchists.

The injustice of what has happened is blatantly obvious to everyone. But what to do about it? There is no point in simply arguing for the 'overthrow of capitalism'. Many people would probably agree with us now. The problem is how to do this; how to create a different system from the point where we are at now.

At the moment, we are incredibly dependent on the system. When there is a crisis, it is the working class who suffers. Therefore, many people would like to see the situation going back to what it was. This will only happen if capitalism recovers and starts growing again. In other words, the economic well-being of the working class is tied to the well-being of capitalism. This is not a good situation to be in. I would like to suggest a few ideas of what we could be arguing and doing as anarchists:

1. Workers should not get in debt in order to spend. It is not up to us to bail out the banking system. There should be calls for people to tear up their credit cards and protest at banks.

2. In some ways, this decline in consumption is a blessing in disguise for the environment. Car driving has been cut back as have the number of people flying. We are getting the 'negative growth' that the French Anarchist Federation called for in its 'decroissance' (literally ungrowth) campaign.

However, this is not the kind of negative growth they had in mind. Maybe we should welcome this reduction in consumption but argue for redistribution of the wealth that is so obviously there. We could organise a campaign around this, arguing the ruling class has caused the crisis, so why should they continue to hoard such great wealth?

Workers are ready to challenge the arguments that they have to sacrifice because there is no money, both to bail out the banks and conduct wars. It even makes 'economic' sense. Why put the money in the hands of the banks so that they will lend money to businesses and consumers? We could call for money to be given to people for housing.

3. The workplace is the ideal area to launch campaigns. It could be done through local union branches or through the IWW. There should be a call for wage increases, a demand to bail us out, not the bankers.

> What is most despicable is the way top people in the financial system continue now to pay themselves massive salaries
>
> Anarchist Federation

Again, the argument could be that the economy needs us to spend.

We refuse to get into debt, so we need higher wages. We can also challenge the great gap in wages between workers and the bosses.

4. There can also be a campaign to investigate pension funds and guarantee pensions. Already some companies are getting rid of final salary pension fund schemes and generally trying to reduce their commitments to paying what they originally committed. Pension funds will also have bought many of the dodgy securities and workers in workplace pension schemes should be calling for investigations into the health of the investments, demanding that they do not pay the price of poor investment decisions.

5. A key problem with the economic crisis is that it reveals the extent that we are dependent on a successful capitalism. We are all tied into the system one way or another. The more financial commitments one has – mortgage, debt, children, or simply addiction to consuming – the less likely it is that people will take action. They don't want to destroy the system that they are dependent on.

Therefore, we need to seriously think about ways of creating an alternative economy now, not wait until 'after the revolution'. This is not a substitute for other actions but a complement that could achieve both short-term and long-term benefits. In the short-term we could make people better off.

By being less dependent on capitalist markets and producing and trading independently, we can still get the goods that we need. In addition, it brings people together and prepares the way for economic organisation in a post-revolutionary period.

We have already looked at this with the ideas of participatory economics. This could involve creating networks of different producers and consumers who trade directly with each other. We could also consider the idea of our own banks, just like workers set up their own 'friendly societies' in the 19th century. We can stress the importance of quality of life rather than the obsessive consumption that has gripped us all.

Focusing on the economic crisis does not mean that people should stop other campaigns they are involved in because they are all linked. With a deepening crisis, racist, fascist and nationalist ideas will come to the fore. We must fight to maintain an international perspective.

The State will increase its repressive apparatus in order to control any unrest that will increasingly erupt as the recession deepens. And, our concerns with the environment and global warming cannot be forgotten.

We must challenge the 'jobs at any cost' argument that makes it possible for the government to continue with projects such as the third runway at Heathrow. We have to stress that we can live well without these things, through a redistribution of wealth and a reorganisation of society.

This strategy will enable us to actually win something, increase the confidence of the working class, and help prepare us for an actual revolution by weakening the ruling class and strengthening our position both in terms of power but in skills and capacities for self-organisation.

Anarchists both in the UK and internationally need to work together for an international perspective and strategy on the crisis. The mass of the working class is clearly fed up and would like to take action. We need to spread our analysis of capitalism and the role of the State. Equally important, anarchists need to build up a presence in workplace struggles and community campaigns. Quoting the Anarchist Federation's industrial strategy:

"Our task is not to have the 'correct' political position and wait for capitalism to fall, perhaps criticising their 'mistakes' along the way. The movement must break down the barriers of class society and recreate society in its own terms.

"This is the revolution. The development of a widespread 'culture of resistance' amongst working class people is a necessary condition for this to take place. This culture develops through real experiences of people in their everyday lives."

This discussion document, first circulated within the Anarchist Federation, is published here as part of the AF's ongoing work with Black Flag. Views expressed on articles bearing this logo are specifically endorsed by the AF. afed.org.uk or email info@afed.org.uk

Give some credit

Most anarchists will find Richard Dawkins" critique of god and religion in The God Delusion (Bantum Press, London, 2006) both admirable and timely. However, most would be surprised that any critique of god would fail to mention, never mind discuss, Bakunin's God and the State.

This anarchist classic explores the logic of religion, explaining why it has such a baneful effect on humanity. Most anarchists would agree Bakunin's book is essential reading for all seeking to understand religion. Bakunin is, however, mentioned in passing and it is worthwhile to explain the fallacies associated with it.

First, it is essential to note that the argument against anarchism is not Dawkins', but as they are in his book and this would be where most people would see it. It is, however, a quite common fallacy, and resurfaces with regularity – particularly when a government (for whatever reason) becomes neutralised. The resulting disorder is usually labelled "anarchy" and some point to this as empirical evidence that anarchism is impossible. This is based on a fundamentally mistaken notion of what anarchism actually argues.

Respected: But Richard Dawkins misses the anarchist critique of religion in his work

As part of his excellent discussion on whether religion makes us good or not, Dawkins quotes [p. 228] "Steven Pinker's disillusioning experience of a police strike in Montreal":

"As a young teenager in proudly peaceable Canada during the romantic 1960s, I was a true believer in Bakunin's anarchism. I laughed off my parents' arguments that if government ever laid down its arms all hell would break loose. Our competing predictions were put to the test. . . when the Montreal police went on strike . . . city authorities had to call in the army and, of course, the Mounties to restore order. This decisive empirical test left my politics in tatters. . ."

Dawkins presents this "just to weaken our confidence", after arguing that "I dearly want to believe that I do not need such surveillance -- and nor, dear reader, do you." [p. 228]

What does this example (and others like it) mean for anarchism? Surely this shows that governments are needed? Anarchists argue that it does not mean much for anarchism. Few anarchists are remotely surprised that in such circumstances people take advantage of the lack of police and act in anti-social ways. This is because, regardless of what the teenage Steven Pinker thought, anarchists do not think that simply removing government will transform the humans previously subject to it. Rather, we see anarchy coming from a process of social struggle and not being created "over-night" by chance or misfortunate.

This issue has been addressed by anarchists for some time. George Barrett'in his excellent Objections to Anarchism notes: "Even if you could overthrow the government to-morrow and establish anarchism, the same system would soon grow up again.

"This objection is quite true, except that we do not propose to overthrow the government tomorrow. If I (or we as a group of anarchists) came to the conclusion that I was to be the liberator of humanity, and if by some means I could manage to blow up the King, the Houses of Lords and Commons, the police force, and, in a word, all persons and institutions which make up the government – if I were successful in all this, and expected to see the people enjoying freedom ever afterwards as a result, then, no doubt, I should find myself greatly mistaken.

"The chief results of my action would be to arouse an immense indignation on the part of the majority of the people, and a re-organisation by them of all the forces of government.

"The reason why this method would fail is very easy to understand. It is because the strength of the government rests not with itself, but with the people. A great tyrant may be a fool, and not a superman. His strength lies not in himself, but in the superstition of the people who think that it is right to obey him. So long as that superstition exists it is useless for some liberator to cut off the head of tyranny; the people will create another,.

"Suppose, however, that the people develop, and become strong in their love of liberty, and self-reliant, then the foremost of its rebels will overthrow tyranny, and backed by the general sentiment of their age their action will never be undone.

"So the anarchist rebel when he strikes his blow at governments understands that he is no liberator with a divine mission to free humanity, but he is a part of that humanity struggling onwards towards liberty. " [p. 355]

Given this, most anarchists would not be surprised at the result of the police strike nor consider it a "empirical test" of anarchism. Perhaps it could be argued that Pinker was not aware of Barrett and his analysis, yet the same points can be found in a close reading of the anarchist he does mention, Bakunin.

Bakunin, like most anarchists did not have a benign perspective on "human nature" (if we did then we would not be anarchists as giving power to people would be unproblematic!). "All men", he argued, "possess a natural instinct for power" and that "we realise that power and authority corrupt those who exercise them as much as those who are compelled to submit to them." [The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 248 and p. 249]

Given this, it seems unlikely Bakunin would have concluded that simply removing the police would suddenly transform those corrupted by authority into moral individuals nor made those who have never heard of anarchism into libertarians. He was well aware of the effect of environment on an individual"s development:

"Everyone carries within himself the germs of this lust for power, and every germ. . . must develop and grow, if only it finds in its environment favourable conditions. These conditions in human society are the stupidity, ignorance, apathetic indifference, and servile habits of the masses." [Op. Cit., p. 248]

How the police strike could have transformed the "habits of the masses" is left unexplained by Pinker, nor how it could have created appropriate "favourable conditions" to overcome centuries of hierarchical society. This is not to say that Bakunin did not think that a free society was impossible nor that people could not live without government or police. Thus "to make men moral it is necessary to make their social environment moral". Bakunin argued that there three things "necessary for men to become moral": "birth under hygienic conditions"; "a rational and integral education accompanied by an upbringing based upon respect for work, reason, equality, and liberty"; and "a social environment wherein the human individual, enjoying full liberty, will be equal, in fact and by right, to all others." [Op. Cit., p. 155]

Need it be stressed that a police strike creates none of these preconditions? How can a police strike create such an environment, unless you assume that humans are unaffected by hierarchical social relations -- a position which Bakunin would have, rightly, mocked.

What did Bakunin see as the means of getting from a bad social environment to a good one if the former ensures the impossibility of creating people able to live freely? By means of social struggle, by which people transform themselves by changing the world (which is why anarchists argue for self-liberation). "How can this ignorance be dissipated, how can these disastrous prejudices be destroyed?" asked Bakunin. By "only one way: That is complete solidarity in the struggle of workers against the employers", that is "the

where it's due...

Analysis: Iain McKay looks at the weakness in recent complaints about anarchism's relationship to social reality

way of a practical emancipation." Strikes, for example, "awaken in the masses all the social-revolutionary instincts which reside deeply in the heart of every worker... but which ordinarily are consciously perceived by very few workers, most of whom are weighed down by slavish habits and a general spirit of resignation." However, "those instincts" are "stimulated by the economic struggle" and anarchist ideas can "find their way to the minds of the people" and "swiftly proceed toward their full actualisation." [Op. Cit., p. 316 and p. 384] This struggle also creates the structural framework of a free society:

"The organisation of society through a free federation of workers' associations -- industrial and agricultural as well as scientific, artistic, and literary -- first into a commune; the federation of communes into regions, of regions into nations, and of nations into a fraternal international union." [Op. Cit., p. 410]

Nor did Bakunin (like all anarchists) consider a free society as being perfect after a revolution. He pointed to a "more or less prolonged transition period" and he was well aware that a free society would need to defend itself against those seeking to impose their authority on others (and what is genuine crime but that?). Thus, "in an intelligent, wide-awake society, jealously guarding its liberty and disposed to defend its rights, even the most egoistic and malevolent individuals become good members of society. " [Op. Cit., p. 412 and p. 249]

Anarchists, in other words, do not consider anarchism to need perfect people to work, quite the reverse. All we argue is that, after struggling for freedom, people will, in general, act in better ways than they do in unfree ones -- as would be expected, given in the degrading effects of authoritarian social relationships and the empowering effects of revolt and freedom. If you like, freedom, and the struggle for freedom, encourages the better aspects of human nature to predominate and flourish while guarding against and minimising the worse aspects.

It also seems strange that Pinker was surprised looting took place -- after all, any supporter of "Bakunin's anarchism" would know that capitalist society is one marked by massive inequalities, with wealth concentrated in the hands of a few. In such circumstances looting (i.e., individual expropriation of wealth) would be expected as people seek to take what they needed but could not afford. So, no looting (i.e., a respect for inequality and capitalist property rights) would be a surprise for anyone familiar with the anarchist critique of capitalism.

This is not to suggest that looting is part of the anarchist programme, far from it (expropriation should be social in nature, otherwise ownership is transferred rather than eliminated).

Clearly, then, anarchists would not be surprised by the example of the Montreal police strike. This is because the so-called "anarchy" was imposed by an outside event rather than created in the process of a people fighting for their freedom.

Moreover, even in those circumstances, anarchists would not be surprised if some individuals did not take advantage of the situation to loot, get revenge, and so on (as did happen, for example, immediately after the defeat of the military coup in Barcelona in July 1936). In addition, it should be noted that anarchists also think that it is unlikely that anti-social behaviour will totally disappear in a free society -- rather it would just be greatly diminished.

Chaos: Police demonstrate in New York in 2004. Most anarchists would agree in the present climate a lack of police would lead to some looting as society is still highly capitalistic

Given time, it is likely that the police strike would have resulted in some form of community self-defence developing. After all, it would be strange if people did not try to stop those seeking to coerce them -- people have been doing so long before the police were created by the state.

From an anarchist perspective, this is hardly problematic. As Errico Malatesta argued, if people impose themselves by force then "they will be the government" and "we will oppose them with force" for "if today we want to make a revolution against the government, it is not in order to submit ourselves supinely to new oppressors."

Anarchists, he continued, "believe that to act criminally means to violate the liberty of others" and so "when there remains a residue of criminals, the collective directly concerned should think of placing them in a position where they can do no harm, without delegating to anyone the specific function of persecuting criminals." [At the Cafe, p. 99, p. 100 and p. 101]

Like Bakunin, Malatesta argued that "all the bad passions... will not disappear at a stroke. There will still be for a long time those who will feel tempted to impose their will on others with violence, who will wish to exploit favourable circumstances to create privileges for themselves", "those who would encroach on personal integrity, liberty and the well being of others."

Hence "we will defend ourselves... without delegating to anyone the special function of the defence of society" and this, he sressed, will be "the only effective method." The fundamental problem, he argued, was that "the major damage caused by crime is not so much the single and transitory instance of the violation of the rights of a few individuals, but the danger that it will serve as an opportunity and pretext for the constitution of an authority that, with the outward appearance of defending society will subdue and oppress it." [Op. Cit., p. 131, p. 132 and p. 101]

As is the case under the state today, where the police impose the wishes of the ruling elite and defend capitalist property rights well, to various degrees (depending on their wealth), defending the rights of all within that framework.

Ultimately, the notion that anarchy is condemnatory of free people defending themselves against those seeking to coerce

By Iain McKay

Saluting the Red Virgin

Biography: Simone Weil brought a passion for freedom

Simone Weil
Philosopher, Mystic, Anarchist
1909 – 1943

February 2009 saw the 100th anniversary of the birth of Simone Weil, philosopher, Jewish-Catholic religious mystic, pacifist, feminist, union activist and anarchist. Seemingly socially inept and a-sexual, she was often dubbed 'The Red Virgin'. She was however, a deeply complex visionary; and an insightful, passionate and dedicated comrade to the libertarian communist cause.

Weil was born in Paris on February 3rd 1909 to Alsation refugee, agnostic middle-class Jewish parents. Weil was a child genius, proficient in both ancient Greek and Sanskrit at an early age. She graduated in philosophy in 1931. Throughout her relatively short life, she died aged 34, Weil suffered from chronic ill-health and co-ordination problems.

Weil took an early interest in politics, by the age of 10 she declared herself a Bolshevik! Throughout her early years she maintained an interest in the Communist Party but never actually joined. One of her biographers, Mclellan (1990)[2] wrote: "If the Communist Party was an impossible context in which to imagine anyone as individualist and naturally rebellious as Weil, revolutionary syndicalism, by contrast, would appear as her natural home.

"This movement embodied an exceptionally strong feeling for the particular and peculiar nature of the working class and for its outlook born of experience as disinherited and exploited. Its followers preached as complete a break as possible from existing society.

As against social democracy, they had no time for the institutions and practices of parliamentary party politics; and as against Marxism-Leninism, they gave pride of place to the culture and solidarity of the workers founded on their own experiences as workers".

Weil aligned herself with the Paris-based group around La Revolution Prolétarienne; which aimed to protect the working class movement from the twin dangers of reformist collaboration with the bourgoisie and submission to the Moscow orientated dictates of the Communist Party.

While teaching philosophy at a girls' secondary school in Le Puy between 1931 and 1934, she was actively involved in local workers struggles and the general strike of 1933. In an act of solidarity, Weil took twelve months out of education to work in factories to experience working class life first-hand. Only ill-health and physical limitations prevented her from doing this further. Throughout this time she was actively involved in workplace organising and agitation.

In 1934, based upon a series of lectures, Weil started work on the draft of her classic critique of orthodox Marxism and state socialism, Oppression and Liberty[3]; a superb work.

Weil wrote: "I do not think that the workers' movement in this country will become something living again until it seeks, I will not say doctrines, but a source of inspiraation, in what Marx and Marxism have fought against and very foolishly despised: in Proudhon, in the workers' groups of 1848, in the trade union tradition, in the anarchist spirit."

Although this is not strictly a review of Oppression and Liberty, I would like to take the opportunity to recommend it to readers. Oppression and Liberty is indispensible libertarian communist critique of Marx, Marxism, Leninism and state socialism.

In 1936, although a self-proclaimed pacifist, Weil went to Spain and joined the French-speaking section of the anarchist militia, the Sebastion Faure Century.

She rationalised her position thus, "I do not love war; but what has always seemed to me most horrible in war is the position of those in the rear. When I realised that, try as I would, I could not prevent myself from participating morally in that war – in other words, from hoping all day and every day for the victory of one side and the defeat of the other – I decided that, for me Paris was the rear and I took the train to Barcelona, with the intention of enlisting." (Mclellan. 1990).

However, Weil's Spanish incursion was short-lived. Following an accident with a cooking pot, she received serious burns to her legs. Some say this was caused by her innate clumsiness. This culminated in her being sent to Assisi in Italy to convalesce. While there she experienced a profound religious ecstasy in the same church where Francis of Assisi is said to have prayed. A year later it happened again. From this point Weil dedicated her life to matters pertaining to the esoteric and metaphysical.

With the start of WW2 and the Nazi invasion of France, Weil and her family were forced to flee Paris, eventually ending up in London by way of Vichy France and New York. Once she settled in London she aligned herself with the socialist elements within the French Resistance in Exile.

Over the next few years she continued to write prolifically on philosophy, social issues, psychology, religion, spirituality and mysticism.

Eventually, after years of ill-health, over-work, self-neglect and absolute selflessness, Weil suffered a complete physical collapse. She was diagnosed as tubercular in both lungs. Weil refused any kind of special-treatment or adequate diet which would have restored her health. She persisted in continuing her self-imposed chaste and frugal lifestyle in a mis-guided act of solidarity with the working class. She would only eat or receive the treatment that she believed the poorest worker in occupied France received. Given the severity of her illness this was inadequate.

On 24th August 1943 Weil seccumbed to illness and starvation and died in the Grosvenor Sanitorium, Ashford, Kent. On 30th August 1943 she was buried in a pauper's grave in Ashford's Bybrook Cemetry. For 15 years the grave remained unmarked. In 1983 Ashford Borough Council named a street Simone Weil Avenue in her honour.[4]

By Ade Dimmick

> "When I think that the great Bolshevik leaders proposed to create a free working class and that doubtlessly none of them had ever set foot inside a factory, so that they hadn't the faintest idea of the real conditions which make servitude or freedom for the workers – well, politics appears to me a sinister farce."
>
> Simone Weil

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Author: Malatesta in London

Class struggle or class hatred?

In 1921 Malatesta was brought to trial with 80 others in an attempt to break Italian anarchism. Before a jury in Milan, he was accused of being a mouthpiece for hatred, a slight he was to take exception to both in court and through the pages of anarchist newspaper ***Umanità Nova, in 1921...***

I expressed to the jury in Milan some ideas about class struggle and proletariat that raised criticism and amazement. I better come back to those ideas.

I protested indignantly against the accusation of inciting to hatred; I explained that in my propaganda I had always sought to demonstrate that the social wrongs do not depend on the wickedness of one master or the other, one governor or the other, but rather on masters and governments as institutions.

Therefore, the remedy does not lie in changing the individual rulers, instead it is necessary to demolish the principle itself by which men dominate over men; I also explained that I had always stressed that proletarians are not individually better than bourgeois, as shown by the fact that a worker behaves like an ordinary bourgeois, and even worse, when he gets by some accident to a position of wealth and command.

Such statements were distorted, counterfeited, put in a bad light by the bourgeois press, and the reason is clear. The duty of the press paid to defend the interests of police and sharks, is to hide the real nature of anarchism from the public.

The press does that by duty, but we have to acknowledge that they often do it in good faith, out of pure and simple ignorance. Since journalism, which once was a calling, decayed into mere job and business, journalists have lost not only their ethical sense, but also the intellectual honesty of refraining from talking about what they do not know.

Let us forget about hack writers, then, and let us talk about those who differ from us in their ideas, and often only in their way of expressing ideas, but still remain our friends, because they sincerely aim at the same goal we aim at.

Amazement is completely unmotivated in these people, so much so that I would tend to think it is affected. They cannot ignore that I have been saying and writing those things for fifty years, and that the same things have been said by hundreds and thousands of anarchists, at my same time and before me.

Let us rather talk about the dissent.

There are the "worker-minded" people, who consider having callous hands as being divinely imbued with all merits and all virtues; they protest if you dare talking about people and mankind, failing to swear on the sacred name of proletariat.

Now, it is a truth that history has made the proletariat the main instrument of the next social change, and that those fighting for the establishment of a society where all human beings are free and endowed with all the means to exercise their freedom, must rely mainly on the proletariat.

As today the hoarding of natural resources and capital created by the work of past and present generations is the main cause of the subjection of the masses and of all social wrongs, it is natural for those who have nothing, and therefore are more directly and clearly interested in sharing the means of production, to be the main agents of the necessary expropriation.

This is why we address our propaganda more particularly to the proletarians, whose conditions of life, on the other hand, make it often impossible for them to rise and conceive a superior ideal.

However, this is no reason for turning the poor into a fetish just because he is poor; neither it is a reason for encouraging him to believe that he is superior, and that a condition surely not coming from his merit or his will gives him the right to do wrong to the others as the others did wrong to him.

The tyranny of callous hands (which in practice is still the tyranny of few who no longer have callous hands, even if they had once), would not be less tough and wicked, and would not bear less lasting evils than the tyranny of gloved hands. Perhaps it would be less enlightened and more brutal: that is all.

Poverty would not be the horrible thing it is, if it did not produce moral brutishness as well as material harm and physical degradation, when prolonged from generation to generation. The poor have different faults than those produced in the privileged classes by wealth and power, but not better ones.

If the bourgeoisie produces the likes of Giolitti and Graziani and all the long succession of mankind's torturers, from the great conquerors to the avid and bloodsucking petty bosses, it also produces the likes of Cafiero, Reclus and Kropotkin, and the many people that in any epoch sacrificed their class privileges to an ideal.

If the proletariat gave and gives so many heroes and martyrs of the cause of human redemption, it also gives off the white guards, the slaughterers, the traitors of their own brothers, without which the bourgeois tyranny could not last a single day.

How can hatred be raised to a principle of justice, to an enlightened spirit of demand, when it is clear that evil is everywhere, and it depends upon causes that go beyond individual will and responsibility?

Let there be as much class struggle as one wishes, if by class struggle one means the struggle of the exploited against the exploiters for the abolition of exploitation. That struggle is a way of moral and material elevation, and it is the main revolutionary force that can be relied on.

By Errico Malatesta (Umanita Nova)

Glasgow's bloody

Like all the events in political struggle it is difficult to trace the thread back to what brought it to this stage, Bloody Friday 1919 is no different. This was not just an attack on a large demonstration in Glasgow, it was the culmination of a series of radical events in Glasgow and the Clydeside area where the state showed its brutality.

Perhaps we could even take it back to the 18th century and the radicals like Thomas Muir and others. However we can certainly take it back to the rent strikes of the first world war, the forming of the Labour Withholding Committee, (LWC) The Clyde Workers' Committee (CWC) and the political climate of that period.

The rent strike

In pre First World War Glasgow there were a large number of empty houses. By the year 1915 all were occupied by incoming workers to the munitions and allied war industry trades.

A shortage of workers and materials saw a lack of maintenance and the housing stock deteriorate rapidly. At the beginning of the war the landlords tried to implement large rent increases, at the receiving end of this were 7,000 pensioners and families whose men were fighting in France. This brought about the formation of the "Glasgow Women's Housing Association" and many other local "Women's Housing Associations" to resist the increases.

A variety of peaceful activities were used to prevent evictions and drive out the Sheriff's officers. There were constant meetings in an attempt to be one step ahead of the Sheriff's officers.

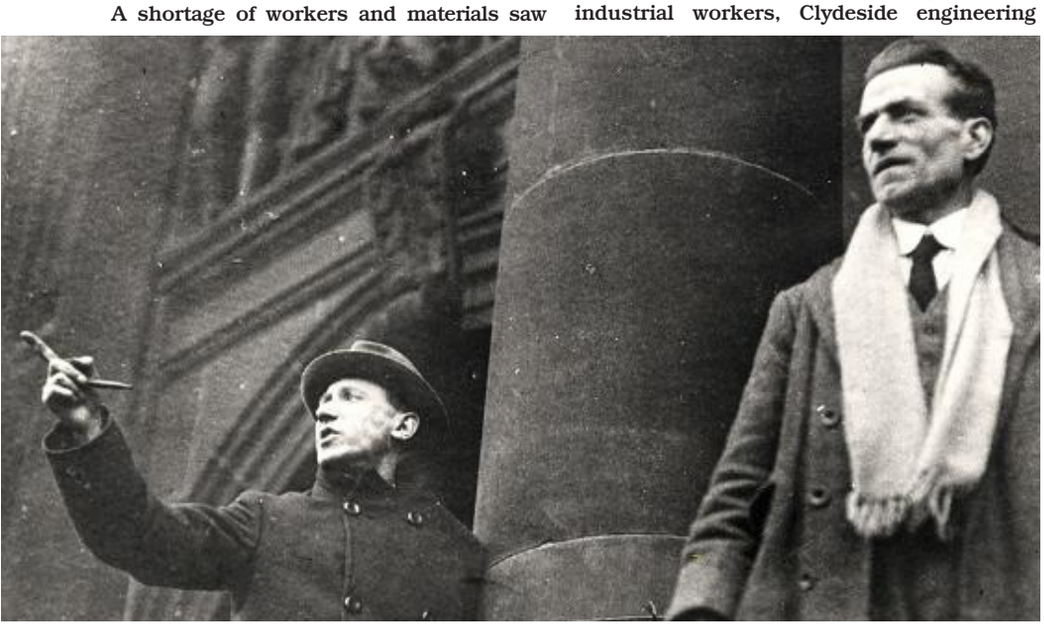
Women would cram into closes and stairs to prevent the entry of the Sheriff's officers and so prevent them from carrying out their evictions. They used little paper bags of flour, peasmeal and whiting as missiles directed at the bowler-hatted officers.

These activities culminated on the 17th of November 1915 with a massive demonstration and march of thousands through the city streets and on to the Glasgow Sheriff's Court. The size of the demonstration caused the Sheriff at the court to phone the Prime Minister of the day, this resulted in the immediate implementation of the "1915 Rent Restriction Act" which benefited tenants across the country.

The Labour Withholding Committee.

This happened in a time of war, so it was obvious that by 1915 Glasgow and Clydeside had a very large class oriented militant grassroots movement and had forced the Government on this occasion to act in their favour.

The rent strike was mainly a women's organisation but the men were proving to be just as militant in the workplaces. Around the same time in 1915 during a prolonged period of considerable economic hardship for most industrial workers, Clydeside engineering employers refused workers' demands for a wage increase. The insatiable demand for war munitions had lead to a rapid rise in inflation and a savage attack on the living standards of the working class.



Speakers: ILP activists and militants Emmanuel Shinwell and Hopkins at the rally

Workers were demanding wage increases to offset these repressive conditions. At this time Weir's of Cathcart was paying workers brought over from their American plant, 6/- shillings a week more than workers in their Glasgow plant.

The dispute between workers and management at Weir's rapidly escalated into strike action. The strike was organised by a strike committee named the Labour Withholding Committee (LWC). This committee comprised of rank and file trade union members and shop stewards. It was they who remained in control of the strike rather than the officials from the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE).

The strike started in February 1915 and lasted almost three weeks. At its peak 10,000 members of the ASE from eight separate engineering works were on strike throughout Clydeside. The officials from the ASE denounced the strike. It was this double pressure from the government and their own trade union that drove the workers from the various engineering works in Glasgow to form the LWC to give the workers a voice.

Although the strikers demands were not met, its importance is in the fact of it forming the LWC. A committee formed from rank and file union members that determined policy in the work place and refused to follow the directives from union officials.

The government, alarmed by the February 1915 strike, summoned trade union leaders to a special conference. The result of this conference being the now notorious Treasury Agreement. All independent union rights and condition, including the right to strike, were abandoned for the duration of the war. It also allowed the employers to "dilute" labour, meaning they could employ unskilled labour in skilled jobs to compensate for the growing labour shortage. The Munitions Act also made strikes illegal and restrictions of output a criminal offence.

October 1915 saw one such tribunal, the outcome of which was that three shipwrights from Fairfield Shipyard on the Clyde were sentenced to one month's imprisonment for their refusal to pay a fine imposed because of their strike action in support of two sacked workers. The imprisonment of the three shipwrights prompted the official union representatives to call for a public enquiry. However, the LWC, which had reformed after the February 1915 strike, were seeking immediate strike action.

A rather shakey and uneasy peace remained while official union leaders and the rank and file LWC waited for the government's response. With the lack of any response from the government, the LWC decided, with the full backing of the workers, to issue an ultimatum to the government; If the shipwrights were not released within three days there would be widespread industrial action throughout Clydeside until their release.

Three days after the LWC ultimatum the shipwrights were released. It was later discovered the imprisoned men's fines had been paid. The general feeling among the LWC and others was that the fines had been paid by ASE officials in an attempt to prevent widespread industrial action on Clydeside over which they could exercise little control.

This victory lead to the LWC deciding to form a permanent committee to resist the Munitions Act. It was to be called the Clyde Workers Committee, (CWC) and organised on the same democratic principles as the LWC. It would have 250-300 delegates elected directly from the workplace, it would meet weekly.

This was a seismic sift in the employee/management working relationship on Clydeside. Up until then shop stewards in the industry merely existed as card inspectors and implementers of national and district committees policies. However, after the forming of the CWC in 1915, increasingly it was the workers through the CWC that

Friday, 31.01.1919

History: How Clydeside fought to the bitter end

controlled the policy on the shop floor.

Arrest and deportation

Between January and March 1916 the Dilution Commission met little or no opposition from workers and trade unions elsewhere on Clydeside. During this period however, minimal progress was made in the Clydeside engineering industry.

A management decision at Beardmore's engineering works Parkhead Glasgow, to refuse shop stewards access to new "dilutees" brought about strike action in March 1916. In the following four days workers at three other munitions factories came out in sympathy with the Beardmore strikers. These events on Clydeside worried the government and the Dilution committee who were afraid that the actions of the syndicalist-inspired CWC would impede munitions production and possibly spread.

On order of the government on March 24 1916, the military authorities arrested and deported Kirkwood, Haggerty, Shields, Wainright and Faulds, the Beardmore shop stewards. On the same day they arrested and deported McManus and Messer two shop stewards from Weir's of Cathcart, one of the factories that came out on strike in Sympathy with the Beardmore strikers.

On March 29 the military authorities again swooped and arrested and deported Glass, Bridges and Kennedy, three more shop stewards from Weir's. The shop stewards were sent to Edinburgh where they had to report to the police three times daily. These restrictions were kept in place until 14 June 1917. These deportations broke the resistance to the implementation of "dilution" in the Clydeside engineering industry, it also realised the government's aim in bring about the demise of the CWCduring the war.

The forty hour week

Following the end of the war there was a fear of mass unemployment due to the demobilisation of the troops and the demise of the munitions factories. The common view held by the majority of workers in shipbuilding, engineering and mining was that a drastic cut in the number of hours in the working week, with the same war time pay levels, was the only solution.

On January 1919 the CWC held a meeting of its shop stewards from shipbuilding and engineering, from this meeting the "Forty Hour" movement was born, and the decision was taken to go with the miners in their demand for a reduction to the weekly hours to help absorb the increase to the workforce and the reducing number of jobs.

In terms of both its tactics and its demands the January 1919, 40 Hours Strike led by the CWC was the most radical strike seen to that date on Clydeside The objectives of the strike were to secure a reduction of weekly working hours to 40 in order that discharged soldiers could be found employment, and to stop the re-emergence of a pool of unemployment, thereby maintaining the strength of the workers against capital. The CWC had widespread support amongst workers and other important trade union bodies within the Clydeside area for their demands for a 40-hour working week

At the start of the strike Clydeside employers were unconcerned. Both the government and trade union officials were also initially unconcerned, feeling that without official support the strike would quickly fade.

These views changed drastically just four days in. By 30 January 1919 40,000 workers in the engineering and shipbuilding industries in Clydeside were out on strike. Electricity supply workers in Glasgow had come out in sympathy, plus the strike was joined by 36,000 miners in the Lanarkshire and Stirlingshire coalfields. It was stated that during the first week of the strike not a single trade in the Clydeside area was left unaffected by strike action. The rapid spread of the strike was attributed to the large-scale deployment of flying pickets by the CWC, largely made up of discharged servicemen.

The demonstration: Bloody Friday

On Friday 31 January 1919 upwards of 60,000 demonstrators gathered in George Square Glasgow in support of the 40-hours strike and to hear the Lord Provost's reply to the workers' request for a 40-hour week. Whilst the deputation was in the building the police mounted a vicious and unprovoked attack on the demonstrators, felling unarmed men and women with their batons.

The demonstrators, including large numbers of ex-servicemen, retaliated with whatever was available, fists, iron railings and broken bottles, and forced the police to retreat. On hearing the noise from the square the strike leaders, who were meeting with the Lord Provost, rushed outside in an attempt to restore order. One of the leaders, David Kirkwood, was felled to the ground by a police baton, and along with William Gallacher was arrested.

After the initial confrontation between the demonstrators and the police in George Square, further fighting continued in and around the city centre streets for many hours afterwards. The Townhead area of the city and Glasgow Green, where many of the demonstrators had regrouped after the initial police charge, were the scenes of running battles between police and demonstrators.

In the immediate aftermath of 'Bloody Friday', as it became known, other leaders of the Clyde Workers' Committee were arrested, including Emanuel Shinwell, Harry Hopkins and George Edbury.

Troops

The strike and the events of January 31 1919 "Bloody Friday" raised the Government's concerns about industrial militancy and revolutionary political activity in Glasgow. Considerable fears within government of a workers' revolution in Glasgow led to the deployment of troops and tanks in the city.

An estimated 10,000 English troops and tanks were sent to Glasgow in the immediate aftermath of Bloody Friday. Soldiers with fixed bayonets marched with tanks through the streets of the City. There were soldiers patrolling the streets and machine guns on the roofs in George Square.

No Scottish troops were deployed, with the government fearing fellow Scots, soldiers or otherwise, would go over to the workers. It was the British state's largest military mobilisation against its own people and showed they were quite prepared to shed workers" blood in protecting the establishment.

Injured: Clyde Workers' Committee leader Davie Kirkwood lies on the ground after a police attack

On 10 February 1919 the 40-hours strike was called off by the Joint Strike Committee. Whilst not achieving their stated aim of a 40-hour working week, the striking workers from the engineering and shipbuilding industries did return to work having at least negotiated an agreement that guaranteed them a 47-hour working week; 10 hours less than prior to the strike.

gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/redclyde/index.htm
gcal.ac.uk/radicalglasgow/
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By John Couzin

Bakunin for the

Interview: Iain McKay talks to Mark Leir about his new biography, Bakunin: The Creative Passion

Mark Leier is a Canadian historian of working class history and the director of the Centre for Labour Studies at Simon Fraser University. An anarchist, he has written on extensively on British Columbia's rich history of labour radicalism.

His fourth book, Bakunin: The Creative Passion (Thomas Dunne Books, 2006), is an excellent biography of one of the founders of anarchism. We thought it would good to ask him why Bakunin would be of interest to 21st century activists.

Why write a biography of Bakunin?

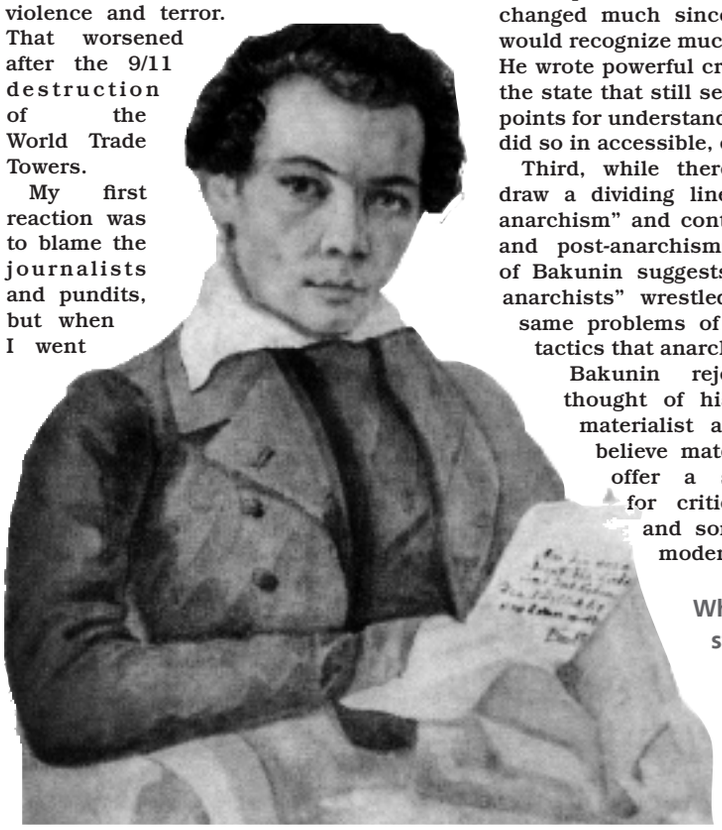
I first started thinking about a biography of Bakunin in the aftermath of some of the anti-globalization and anti-WTO protests, such as the "Battle in Seattle" and the terrible police brutality in Genoa that resulted in the death of Carlo Giuliani.

The anarchist presence at these protests had the media and "terrorism experts" scrambling to explain what was going on.

Of course they were trying to explain away anarchism, not to understand, and they relied on parodies of anarchism. When they tried to do historical analysis, they always took it back to Bakunin, painting him as the father of propaganda by the deed, which they always interpreted as blind violence and terror.

That worsened after the 9/11 destruction of the World Trade Towers.

My first reaction was to blame the journalists and pundits, but when I went back to the English language works on Bakunin, such as Carr's book and Mendel's and Berlin's articles, it was obvious that there was no comprehensive book, aimed at a more general audience, that treated Bakunin seriously as an activist and a thinker. So I decided to try to do that. I didn't set out to write the biography of Bakunin or the most comprehensive biography; I tried to write a biography that used some primary research and that built on the splendid academic work on Bakunin that was not easily accessible to a non-academic audience.



What does Bakunin offer radicals today?

First, he offers some hope, hope in the importance of struggle. This was an activist who fought on the losing side all of his life, yet did not lose his passionate hope, his understanding, that the struggle itself was meaningful, for without it, the world would certainly get worse. While some seem him as a quixotic figure, I see him as one who realistically assessed the opportunities for success and failure and decided to fight for an ideal even when he thought there was no immediate chance of victory.

Second, he offers a clear appraisal of what the radicals' targets should be. After all, capitalism and the state have not changed much since his time; Bakunin would recognize much in the 21st century. He wrote powerful critiques of capital and the state that still serve as useful starting points for understanding the world, and he did so in accessible, evocative language.

Third, while there is a tendency to draw a dividing line between "classical anarchism" and contemporary anarchism and post-anarchism, a careful reading of Bakunin suggests that the "classical anarchists" wrestled with many of the same problems of goals, strategy, and tactics that anarchists face today.

Bakunin rejected the idealist thought of his day to become a materialist and a realist, and I believe materialism and realism offer a stronger foundation for criticism than idealism and some variants of post-modernism.

What were Bakunin's strengths and weaknesses?

Like most of us, his strengths and weaknesses often stemmed from the same source. As an activist, one of his strengths was his optimism, optimism not so much about the possibility of success so much as optimism about the necessity for radical analysis and action.

At the same time, it is often the case that refusing to appreciate incremental change can be immoral. Let me give you an example. Many anarchists refuse to vote, for many very good reasons. At the same time, voting for a slightly more progressive party may mean real benefits for people. Even if that benefit is only, say, $50 a month more for someone on welfare, that $50 is crucial for some people. And so it may be that some practical politics should also inform anarchist ideas about what to do now.

Of course I am simplifying the question and I would not presume to tell anarchists what should be done, but I offer this as an example where a straightforward argument on refusing to vote may not be as principled as it first seems.

As a thinker, one of his great strengths was his ability to write passionate, inspiring prose. At the same time, he could be a little imprecise in his analysis. I have tried to appreciate Bakunin's strengths rather than harp on the weaknesses.

Why do you think his ideas are not more accepted?

I think his ideas are not more accepted precisely because he was right. If patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel, pragmatism is the first refuge of the scoundrel. Bakunin always shines a critical light on the compromisers and those who insist that we have to settle for less. Now, as I suggested above, sometimes compromise is all you can do, and a little may be better than nothing, but Bakunin's insistence that we must always strive for more, even when we compromise, is a stinging rebuke to those who say, "this far, but no further."

Q. There are lots of distortions and misrepresentations attached to Bakunin. What do you think are the worse?

As you suggest, this would be a long list. Among the worst – the belief that he believed in terror for the sake of terror. His arguments about violence were much more sophisticated and complicated than that, but they have been reduced to absurd notions by his critics and sometimes by his supporters.

His arguments about bandits as a revolutionary force have often been misinterpreted – the social bandits of Russia that he talked about were very different from, say, motorcycle gangs or criminal gangs.

21st century

Not every outlaw is an anarchist – some more closely resemble fascists, whatever understanding we have for the fact that social forces created them. Bakunin's anti-Semitism has been greatly misunderstood. At virtually every talk I've given on Bakunin, I'm asked about it. Where it exists, it is repellent, but it takes up about five pages of the thousands of pages he wrote, was written in the heat of his battles with Marx, where Bakunin was slandered viciously, and needs to be understood in the context of the 19th century.

How central were secret societies in his thought?

In my opinion, the secret societies have been greatly exaggerated. In some cases, they didn't exist beyond Bakunin and a few friends, and so functioned like affinity groups, not revolutionary cells; in other cases, they had good reason for being secret, for open groups were an invitation for arrest and imprisonment.

The important point is that as an anarchist, Bakunin did not believe in secret, conspiratorial coups but in open action and propaganda. The idea that he believed the social revolution would be accomplished by small sects is simply wrong.

How were the early documents created for these groups?

It varies – some pretty clearly seem to be Bakunin's own work, while others are clearly more collective statements. He wrote incessantly, and re-wrote incessantly, not to say obsessively, working and re-working the material over time, and he clearly incorporated the ideas of others as he went. He didn't live in a closet or an ivory tower, and his ideas evolved as he worked with other people.

Can nineteenth century be drawn upon to find new solutions to new problems?

I think that if Bakunin were dropped into our society today, he would be impressed with the technological progress but dismayed by the lack of social and political progress. Many of the same problems that existed in his day are still here today, and in many ways, we have declined, not progressed. The tsar's prisons, for example, were regarded as the worst in Europe, but in many ways, the treatment of prisoners such as Bakunin was better than that found in US prisons today.

What is the relationship of Bakunin to Proudhon's anarchism?

Bakunin was undoubtedly influenced by Proudhon's sense of justice and liberty, and by his personality, but intellectually, the influence was rather limited. Bakunin believed that Proudhon had not made the intellectual breakthrough to a materialist understanding of the world.

For Bakunin, that understanding that ideas do not exist in some pure form but come out of real, lived experience, opportunity, and constraints was crucial. For good or ill, Bakunin was a sophisticated intellectual, aware of contemporary trends and thought. Proudhon was not, and so was less of an intellectual influence on Bakunin. But anarchism is not just an intellectual position; it is also an ethical one and a moral one. In that sense, Proudhon's anarchism, what Bakunin thought of as his "instinctual" understanding of anarchism, was important.

How instrumental was Bakunin in creating modern anarchism?

Anarchism in particular would seem to be a movement in which it would be a mistake to attribute the creation or founding of a movement to a single person. But I think anarchism is not just living without authority; it is also a political theory, a set – or sets, sometimes in conflict! – of ideas.

In tracing the evolution of ideas, historians are often limited to those who left records, either their own written work, works written about them, records of organisations, and the like. That is unfair, but it is the way the past works. So Bakunin's influence, his "credit" for creating modern anarchism, is in large part due to his prominence as a writer and activist. He was very effective as a writer and famous – infamous, perhaps, as an activist, and a powerful and inspirational thinker.

It is unfair to say he created modern anarchism, but he did much to make it intelligible and accessible, and in that sense, deserves some credit.

Is his reputation an example of radicals subscribing (unknowingly) to a "great men" perspective on history?

Few of us would deny that some people are inspirational, or have articulated our thoughts more carefully than we have, or have taken on roles that we admire. In that sense, I have no quarrel with "great person history."

But the more usual meaning is to insist that history is only made by "great men and women of power," of kings and queens and magnates. That is a reactionary notion of history that serves power, not people. No one would cast Bakunin as that sort of "great man."

Many people know Bakunin's aphorism about authority – how he would absolutely acknowledge the authority of the bookmaker on questions involving boots. But even then, Bakunin insisted he would not bow down to that authority and would not do whatever the bookmaker recommended.

So too with Bakunin: we can choose to listen to him and acknowledge his work as an anarchist thinker and activist without conceding for a moment that we must bow to him as the authority on anarchism.

Growing: Bakunin poses for a photograph at the height of his popularity and, left, as a young man

Having said that, I do think that there is much of interest and utility in his work, though others may disagree. And few anarchists have ever treated Bakunin as an authority the way some Marxists have consulted Marx for everything from understanding history to fixing their faucets.

Do you think that a merger of Bakunin and Marx is possible?

In some ways, that synthesis has always been there. Alvin Gouldner called Bakunin the first "post-Marxist," meaning someone who built on Marx's insights and focused on questions that Marx had not thought much about or was mistaken about, such as the nature of the state, the problems of vanguardism, and the ambiguous role of the "revolutionary intellectuals" and their relationship to radical and working class movements.

Of course much of Marx's insight was his own ability to synthesize ideas from different fields, from philosophy, socialist theory, and political economy, and Bakunin was in substantial agreement with Marx on many issues.

On some issues where they disagreed, they misunderstood each other and in fact

Biographer: Mark Leir hopes his book will reopen the issue of Bakunin's legacy

were more similar than they allowed; on other issues, their personalities and dislike for each other clouded the controversies.

But I think it is fair to say that Marxism becomes more palatable and inspiring the more it approaches anarchism, while anarchism becomes more powerful as a way to view to world critically the closer it approaches the best Marxist traditions.

Do you think revolutionary unionism can grow in influence again?

If we change the question a little, to ask, will revolutionary workers' movements grow in influence again, I think the answer is, if they do not, we are in grave danger.

I doubt they will take the very same form they did in the past, but workers' movements have always risen, declined, and risen again in new forms to meet new conditions.

Clearly the world can not continue as it has; the old choice, socialism or barbarism, still faces us.

Here I am using socialism in the old sense, not as state socialism, Bolshevism, and the like.

And no group can build socialism – anarchism – other than the working class. Whether it will or not is the question.

Was Bakunin's anarchism heavily linked with revolutionary unionism?

Yes, Bakunin, or the ideas that he represented, were hugely influential in building revolutionary unionism. In some ways, the IWW represented that synthesis between Bakunin and Marx we talked about earlier.

As for today's union activists, that radical vision and tradition can be hugely inspiring; the attempt to grapple with big ideas is essential; the insistence on organizing from the periphery to the centre, not from the centre out, is fundamental.

Your book Red Flags and Red Tape looks at labour movements becoming institutionalised. Would this affect even a revolutionary union?

I suspect any group of two or more people starts running into problems of power and authority and decision-making! But you're right, the question is the institutionalisation of power. One of the things

I argue in Red Flags and Red Tape is that people with some power – and the power of these early labour bureaucrats was limited – often make the wrong decision for the right reasons.

That is, they were trying to build working class militancy, trying to move workers to resistance, trying to create a labor newspaper, trying to form new organisations – all worthy aims.

But precisely because they were not immediately accountable, they made their decisions in a vacuum, without input and consensus from union members. That separated them from the members and created a bureaucracy: rule by office holders.

The other thing I argue is that a union can be militant and revolutionary without being democratic; alternatively, though rare, a union could be conservative and democratic.

So the dangers of bureaucracy are always there. The way to avoid is to ensure that institutions that let officials make important decisions by themselves are not created in the first place.

What areas of working class and anarchist history need investigating?

I have three answers here. The first is that there has been an explosion of work in working class and anarchist history in recent years.

A lot of it has been published by university and academic presses, and that is great, but we also need people to make that work more accessible and to synthesize it. Second, there are huge areas of working class and anarchist history that need investigating.

The "ethnic" press of these movements has not been adequately explored, at least not in North America; the ways in which anarchism has sometimes retreated to academia, but remained influential nonetheless is important to unearth; the writers and activists who have pushed that synthesis of Marx and Bakunin need to be explored.

Here I'm thinking of people such as Paul Mattick, who never called himself an anarchist but was as anti-authoritarian and anti-vanguard as Bakunin, and Erich Fromme as just a few examples. And I am sure there are many, many other areas that need exploration.

But the third answer, and really, these are observations and suggestions, not answers, is for anarchists to write about every aspect of history from an anarchist perspective.

That is, there is no reason why anarchist history should only study anarchism. It could study governments and capitalism and war and every other historical topic from an anarchist perspective. That would be exciting work.

Richard Dawkins has provoked a lot of responses with The God Delusion, would Bakunin have approved?

Bakunin would likely have approved of Dawkins's atheism, but I suspect he would think Dawkins's particular critique was a little naive. While Bakunin was a ferocious atheist, he understood the appeal of religion to the oppressed.

If you want to "cure" religion, he insisted, you had to remove poverty and oppression. If religion were not a social institution, a social power, but a matter of individual belief, then it wouldn't much matter what people believed, for it would not intrude on their lives.

At the same time, they would soon realise that if they wanted things to change, they could make those changes without appeal to a non-existent power.

If they wanted to understand the world, knowledge would be available to them and while they could continue to believe in anything they wanted, when they wanted to work in the world, they would understand that science – real knowledge of whatever field – differs from religion in that it has to deliver or it gets discarded.

Take away its social power, and religion is no longer an issue. Blaming people for seeking some small solace isn't helpful.

Bakunin had a pretty eventful life. Would his biography make a good film?

I often thought it would be a great film, or, at least, one I'd like to see. But Spielberg and Scorcese haven't returned my calls. Robbie Coltrane would be my choice to play Bakunin, and he already has the beard from the Harry Potter series.

Marx is a little trickier; but someone with the intensity of Robert De Niro could pull it off, though that particular casting does boggle the mind.

Personally, I'd love to see Jack Nicholson pull one of his famous hissy fits with a faceful of yak hair glued on as he kicked and shouted about Bakunin's ideas on the commune...

By Iain McKay

Review: Journalist's history is interesting, but flawed

Living working or die fighting – how the working class went global
Paul Mason
Publisher: Vintage
ISBN: 978-0099492887
Paperback 304pp

Contrary to the publicity, this is not a book of explanations – more a series of accounts of insurrectionary activity collected from the last 200 years.

The author, a television journalist known of the left (he featured as a speaker at last year's anarchist Projectile film festival), has carried out a lot of research from a wide range of periods and countries.

He presents them as a series of stories and links them together over the years to justify the subtitle about the working class globalisation. The result is a unique volume of chapters or sections which follow on one another to provide an impressive sequence of an introduction to socialism in action. Nothing looked at in full, but a broad brush picture is painted, well worth your time and effort. Further reading suggestions on some of the topics raised are listed at the end of this review.

The new approach

What is new with this publication is not the academic research – much of his information comes from existing books, albeit it in several languages – but the re–writing of the stories into small readable chapters. Much of the subject matter will be familiar to experienced readers, like the Paris Commune and London dockers' strike of 1889 but some is relatively new to this reviewer at least.

This includes important details of the General Union of Jewish Workers or the Bund and its communities in East Europe after the turn of the century. The vibrant Jewish mini world was erected in the old Poland area in general but in particular in the town of Brzeziny. Destroyed by the Nazis with the loss of thousands of lives, it was painstakingly resurrected afterwards into a unique narrative. This section ends with the desperate fight back in Warsaw.

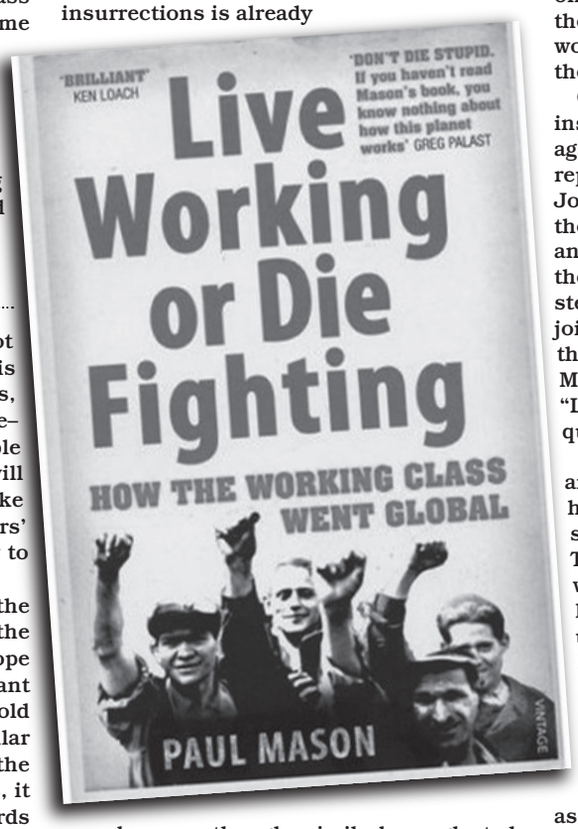
Two other studies in particular are outstanding. The nationalist revolt of Sun Yet Sen in colonial China from 1911 until the repression by Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang, or KMT, in 1927 is virtually forgotten.

Getting information requires much sorting, ferreting out, reading obscure published sources until the hidden histories are revealed. Behind the familiar tale of national liberation degenerating into totalitarianism, there is the story of a very strong anarchist movement, largely unknown due to general and academic neglect.

The powerful libertarians were crushed in the treacherous killings in the cities 1927 by the ambitions of Chiang and his war lords/landlord reactionaries. It must be said that many had been previously integrated into the nationalist movement.

The emergent Russian state capitalism under Lenin, then Stalin, were also victims of the military Right but lived to fight another day with Mao Zedong's peasant army. The massacres and betrayals are horrifying! [Dirlik] You will only get the bare bones of this from Mason but take my word the story of the Chinese anarchism is fascinating, with all its pluses and minuses.

Nearer home but from the same period, the two red years in Italy of 1918–20 are the subject of a good deal of myth and speculation. Thanks however to a conscientious and imaginative old style communist, the real story behind the mass insurrections is already



known, though similarly neglected. The cast is much the same – a militant working class, a strong anarcho syndicalist movement, emerging "communism" and a worried ruling class willing to call in the military forces for oppression, in this case in the form of the fascists.

The difference here is the existence of a group of socialists who, having learnt the lesson from Britain and Germany, were determined to try to influence the workers' councils and push them towards the collective society. Antonio Gramsci and his New Order journal, openly critical of the two prior experiences in the war combatants, were astonishingly effective in generalising, collectivising and organising the shop stewards councils in north industrial Italy into a force for socialism.

The later details of the two year crisis are again fairly well known: deserted by the official trade union and Labour leadership, and also the sectarian marxists, the workers fought vigorously in their own interests. Eventually the ruling class tactic of calling in the fascists proved successful, as it was also to be in Spain, Germany, etc. The model of the socialist group, working with workers councils, remains an example for the future. Situations rarely repeat themselves but the example of the NO group is well worth copying – thoroughly recommended. [Levy]

General criticism

Coming now to a different scene and a point of criticism which can serve as a general one for much of the book. This concerns the astonishing resilience of the French silk workers against the overwhelming power of the advancing mechanisation of capitalism.

Chapter two examines the Lyon insurrections in the years after 1830 and again reads like a well-informed journalist's report. We read of Jean-Claude Romand, Joseph Benoit and the rest, ranged against the 400 silk manufacturers; rationalisations and a cut in tariffs are on the agenda, and the textile community took three significant steps. They set up a Workers' Commission, joined the National Guard and established the first workers' newspaper in history. Mason describes the events, and the slogan "Live working or die fighting" which are quite inspirational.

However the implications of the struggle are not examined. These momentous happenings were of extraordinary significance for the workers' movement. To discover this we need to turn to the works of Daniel Guerin. His interesting little book which attempts a form of unity between the conflicting ideas of libertarianism and marxism, both of which he had experience, summarises the conclusions subsequently listed by Proudhon, based initially on the Lyon events.

Its essential features were an overall association of labour and:

- every associated individual to have an indivisible share in the enterprise,
- each worker to take his share of heavy, dirty, or dangerous work, in the workplace and /or society,
- each to be trained for, and to do, all the operations of the workplace or industry,
- remuneration to be proportional to skill and responsibility of the job,
- profits to be shared in proportion
- each to be free to set his own hours, work as defined and leave the association at will,
- management and technicians to be elected, and work regulations to be subject

to collective approval,
- office holders to be elected.

Most of the ideas of industrial and political liberation can be implied from the demands, though Proudhon's strong opposition to strikes – the most likely means of achieving these – was just one of many contradictions in his theories.

For the ongoing success of the struggle against capitalism, not only must there be fightbacks and victories but these must become public knowledge. Only by a process such as Proudhon organised and Guerin has publicised, can this be done and the limitation of the journalistic approach in the generalisation procedure be recognised. This criticism applies to the Mason project overall.

What's in it

It is a sad fact that what you read in books is generally not the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Writers are for practical reasons in any case required to select their material and they do this from what they consider is important.

Going right back to pre-history, both the spoken and written word has been used for a variety of purposes but the main one has been to advance self interest, or specifically the wealth of leaders or kings. Some have given social explanations, or supernatural ones, often relating to " the gods " and so on, and the careful citizen has been wise to examine the evidence as best as he or she can. We have to do likewise here.

Conflict

In modern society, there are conflicting schools of thought that seek to explain the world. The motive is basically the same – self interest – and that is especially true of the main set of ideas which evolve from and propagate the value of capitalism. This set of ideas has aided the transformation of a largely agricultural and fractured world into a predominantly industrial one.

But many have the definite opinion that private ownership, the automatic priority of wealth, the inevitable competition that results in disastrous wars, discrimination, hierarchy and privilege has run its course. A change is due, with Karl Marx being the most consistence critic from 1840.

Marxism is a theory about a new society coming from the action of political representatives, using popular discontent as their justification. It reduces political activity to theories of planned action, often grossly inadequate, but has been the centre of resistance for more than a century. It proposes a replacement structure or State, which then progresses onto the final objective, "communism".

New worlds like Russia, etc, have been based on this hope.

An alternative theory was proposed most eloquently by Mikhail Bakunin. His point was that Marx's replacement regime was almost certain to erect a new dictatorship and that real change would only come from citizens ignoring the political perspectives and taking over first workplaces, then society, by themselves – with no mediating group.

Libertarians believe that Bakunin's ideas are at least as important as Marx's and point triumphantly at the massive Russian revolution and its degeneration into the farce of state capitalism.

These two ideas have been in conflict with each other, and with the more modest sets of ideas which accept capitalist reforms, for decades. Within the world of opposition, most activity involves the propagation of the alternative viewpoints and "chauvinism " for the respective corners dominates much space and time.

Recent rebellion: The workers at an occupied factory in Argentina celebrate success

Attempts to encompass all three areas of activity have been very few indeed, we comment on these below. Hence the first question asked of a new publication is – is this libertarian, marxist or a modest reform of capitalism, that is being advocated?

Some readers will retain a faith in the disinterestedness of academic writers. Many Libertarians, believe that in reality and to put the issue crudely, academics still pursue the interests of those that pay them – capitalists. This is too large a subject to pursue here but doubters should consult Noam Chomsky's Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship.

The major point of this is a summary of the real events in the Spanish Revolution 1936-39, which Mason contrasts in exact detail with the book of a leading liberal American writer. His criticism is a thorough demolition job, not just on political grounds because he says he respects the author's liberal principles(?) but on the academic grounds of unsubstantiated statements, neglect of the evidence, selection of facts, avoidance of awkward events and such like.

It should also be noted Chomsky's own references are to such hostile writers as Leon Trotsky, that he also uses Pierre Broue's highly recommended book, despite that author's well known Leninism.

In summary, he uses a methodology which cleverly exemplifies the subject of the text.

We can conclude that this academic bias is the rule rather than the exception. Of course, not all documents can be categorised in this way and a minority are more reliable. Finding such authors before their books are relegated to be "out of print" or they are promoted, integrated, bought off or otherwise subverted, is the trick and it is not always apparent how to do it. Some independent writers whatever their background, especially from groups like Solidarity for workers power, Chris Pallis, etc, need to be sought out and their books acquired for present or future use.

For now we can say that, as an absolute minimum, if other writers want to continue with their partisan approach they should be open about their views and opinions in both academic and other aspects, even regarding so called "neutral" documents. This is probably impossible in the present world, it must be admitted.

Making choices

So back to the case in point. We can recap on the chronological details of the content:
1819 the Peterloo massacre, Manchester, England.
From **1830** Lyons and the south of France textile workers' struggles.
From **1830** the Paris Commune.
1871 – unskilled workers USA.
Post 1860 USA Fight for the eight hour day, and May Day,
1886 – the Dockers' tanner-an-hour strike, London.
1889-1895 Jewish struggles for organisation in Eastern Europe.
1905 German workers' movement against the totalitarian government.
1911-27 Shanghai workers in the nationalist revolution.
1918-20 Turin and the Italian workers' factory occupations.
1934-9 French workers and the popular front struggles.

1933-40 The workers' industrial insurrections in US car factories.

Mason links these to the current struggles in:

2001 the Argentinean factory occupations.
2003 Shenzen factory workers, Canton.
2006 the Nigerian slum uprisings.
2005 Basra oil workers strikes and Delhi silk workers fighting for their jobs.
2006 El Alto, Bolivia as ethnic peoples gather their strength against entrenched interests.
2006 Canary Wharf cleaners, migrant employees battle with the privatised interests that the Labour government gives so much power to.

The author

Coming to the work in hand, it is therefore necessary to assess the standpoint of the author. In the present case Paul Mason is a journalist. He may regard it as necessary to observe certain customs to protect his own professional reputation. Regardless of these superficial procedures, libertarian socialists would be advised to dig a little deeper and make a more realistic assessment.

This involves not just the usual admissions and confirmations, but also finding the sources of the writer's ideas, to better identify them. In this case, after listing the contents, we must now list his omissions, which turn out to be almost as impressive.

There is nothing at all about the long Spanish revolution from 1931 to 1939; nothing about the massive experiments in workers' councils, workers' co-operatives and the collective economy in the Republican areas. This great and brave resistance, a forerunner for the second world war has been obliterated from history.

Nor is this example isolated. There is plenty on the eastern European lands where anarchism was widespread in the early years of the century but the briefest of paragraphs only on the libertarian workers' councils of Nestor Makhno in the Ukraine.

Any history of the libertarian movement, from Max Nettalu's classic to Peter Marshall's modern encyclopedia will find whole chapters ignored by Mason. While there are many references to marxists of one form or other, there is nothing from libertarian sources.

No mention of the classic writers like PJ Proudhon, Michael Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin and Errico Malatesta, and we are led to infer that they had nothing of any value whatsoever to say?

Even the marxists who became libertarians – Murray Bookchin and Daniel Guerin – are totally excluded. You may also be amazed that the oppression of Russian labour, from days after 1917, through the Kronstadt killings and the east European revolts after 1956 are nowhere to be found in this book on liberation.

It remains only to conclude that despite Paul Mason's lack of formal political affiliation and a hint of an assumption of libertarian socialism, or rank and file marxism of some form, the reality is a quite sectarian publication. We can reject out of hand the pretence that the differences aren't there. Having clarified these basic facts, readers will be in a position to assess the information accordingly.

Factfile: Further reading on this topic

- Bookchin, Murray: The Third Revolution – popular movements in the revolutionary era, four volumes [one 1996, 406pp ; two 1998, 351 pp ; three 2003, 350pp; and four 2005, 289pp].
- Broue, Pierre and Emile Temime The Revolution and Civil War in Spain [1970, 591pp] ;
- Chomsky, Noam; editor Barry Pateman: Chomsky on Anarchism, contains Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship [2005, 241pp]
- Dirlik Arif: Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution [1991 USA, 326pp], is incisive.
- Edelman, Marek: The Ghetto Fights, [1990, 119pp] ; an inspirational story ;
- Gorter, Herman: An Open Letter to Comrade Lenin [1921, 1995, 41 pp] still in print, a manifesto where the old activist outargues the master apparachnik ;
- Guerin Daniel: Anarchism – from theory to practice [1970, 166pp] page 46, an ex marxist who attempts to relate the two ideologies and provides a comprehensive introduction to Russian, Italian and Spanish council movements;
- Guerin, Daniel editor ; No Gods, no Masters – an anthology of anarchism, two volumes, translated by Paul Sharkey [1998, 294pp and 276pp] in English at last, an extremely useful resource. ;
- Levy, Carl: Gramsci and the Anarchists [1999, 272pp] ; sheds light on a neglected period ; the same writer provides longer perspectives in a chapter [54pp] covering 1870 to 1926 in David Goodway's For Anarchism – history theory and practice [1989, 279pp] ;
- Maximoff, Gregory Petrovich: The Political Philosophy of Bakunin – scientific anarchism [1964, 434pp] complete with index a unique volume by an experienced libertarian but ignore the subtitle.
- Maximoff, Gregory Petrovich: The Guillotine At Work, two volumes, [1940 & 1975 USA, 555 pages] detailing the destructive tactics of Lenin and Bolshevism
- Williams, Gwyne A: Proletarian Order - Antonio Gramsci, factory councils and the origins of Italian communism 1911-21 [1975, 370pp]
- Wolff, Jonathan: Why Read Marx Today? [2002, 136pp] what can be salvaged from the sectarian excesses ;
- Woodward, Alan: Readers Guide to Workers Council Socialism [2003, 30pp]; a useful introductory booklet

Alternative sources

We can now move onto further sources for readers requiring more information. Apart from the general reference list opposite, we can include a short note both on the facts of insurrections in history and the process of learning something by our study,

For the factual survey, on the subject of insurrections, and revolutions in history, we have no choice but to turn to Murray Bookchin's colossal The Third Revolution – popular movements in the revolutionary era. This is four volumes or 65 chapters and a total of 1,385pp. His publications on this are unequalled and, while not without faults, stand above the rest.

The project is by far the most easily understood general introduction to the theory and practice of revolution.

We cannot examine the content at length but note its scope runs from 1620 to 1940 and covers Europe, Russia and America.

Its early cut off point does exclude the whole of recent history but it is the nearest thing to an encyclopedia. The books are however expensive, with the last two being hardbacks, costing £75 each. Best use a library or a photocopier.

Daniel Guerin meanwhile, whose little introductory volume on anarchism has been referred to above, had an exemplary career in writing about the Nazi menace, tried consciously to bridge the gap between the two main theories of opposition thought. His critique is a model for the general analysis of social theory, and on his death, both sides claimed his soul!

Organisations

Finally we can mention the old council communist movement from just after the Russian revolution in 1917. The founders, Anton Pannekoek and Herman Gorter, old Bolsheviks of widespread and international fame, had fallen out with the Russian Bolsheviks over the dominance of the soviet leaders.

They argued that the situation in the west was quite different and therefore the industrialised working class societies needed the independence to develop their own perspectives. When Lenin and co disagreed, stressing the leadership of the Russians, and had them thrown out of the German party and the Communist International, they set up their own German Workers Party. Later, after Hitler, they reverted to their native Holland and a shell of members did survive Nazism, a relic of earlier optimism.

In the fight against Franco's fascists in the Spanish civil war, 1936-38, the libertarian Friends of Durruti group tried to salvage something of revolutionary organisation

Author: Paul Mason

By Alan Woodward

AFAQ failed to

Review: Richard Alexander is left cold by the move by An Anarchist FAQ from online to paper

"An Anarchist FAQ. Volume One"
McKay, Iain
AK Press. 2008.
Paperback. 555pp.
£20
978-1902593906

This book is based on the web-site of the same name, which has been compiled by a collective of people since 1995. The current volume comprises approximately half of the website, so you will have to wait for Volume 2 to arrive before you get the whole package. Unless you log onto the net and have a look for free.

Which is pretty much the first major issue I have with this book. Why was it ever published in the first place? Why would anyone spend £40 / $50 (approx) to buy two books to read when they can download anything they want from it from the internet? One wonders about the marketing decision, for whom is the book intended?

Libraries will be looking for a proper reference book – which this isn't. It isn't a proper history or encyclopedia for example. In terms of punters buying it – if you can't afford net access you're unlikely to want to spend so much on a book anyway; if you can afford net access – you can find it for free on-line.

Indeed putting the web-site into print form seems to miss the whole point of the FAQ format on the net. On-line you can respond to FAQs quickly and definitively and arrange them so users can find precisely the answer they are looking for.

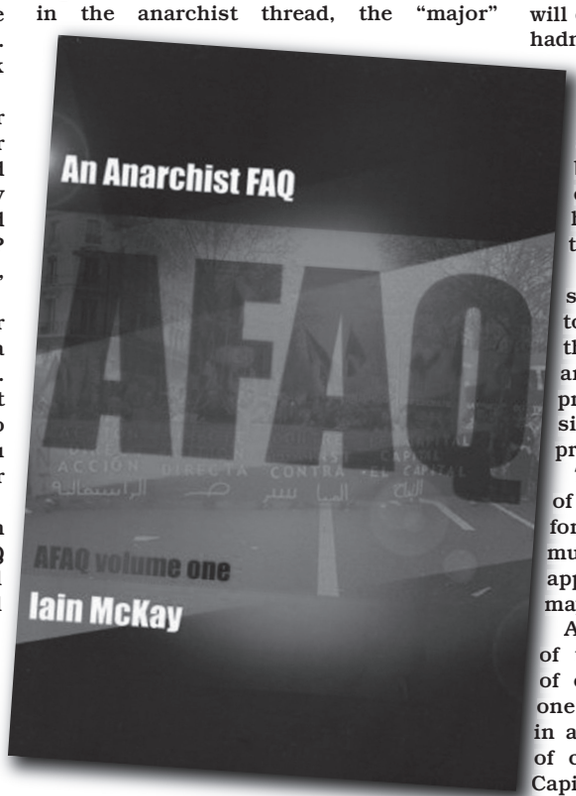
Being online, FAQs can be continually updated to deal with new questions and answers can be revised in light of new information. One can easily refer to other posts, web-sites etc and one can take advantage of search engines to find information.

Putting it in print freezes the text and throws away all the advantages of an online resource. Especially when the index to Volume One is in Volume Two, which won't be published for some time. The printed text in Volume 1 can refer to other sections in the FAQ - but they may also be in the other volume. As indeed will the bibliography.

Anyway what does Volume One actually consist of? You get over 550 pages of double-column text covering the following sections from the web-site: What is anarchism? Why do anarchists oppose the current system? What are the myths of capitalist economics? How do statism and capitalism affect society? What do anarchists think causes ecological problems ? Is "anarcho"-capitalism a form of anarchism? The symbols of Anarchy.

Now I have to confess I haven't read the entire book (I ran out of time half way through – it's not the quickest book to read!) so I won't comment on the second half of the book.

The first section is about anarchism and is an attempt to give some of the basic characteristics of anarchism. The questions answered are quite vague but cover some of the usual questions about "human nature", organisation, hierarchy, the various strands in the anarchist thread, the "major" anarchist thinkers and some examples of "Anarchy in Action".



The anarchist thinkers section is padded out with liberal, socialist and marxist thinkers who are "close" to anarchism. No attempt is made to humanise the text by illustrating the text with photos or drawings of any anarchists, everyone in this book is a faceless name. Which is another of my major gripes with this book. It makes no concession to the reader in terms of livening the pages up. Page after page of double-column text, without a glimmer of colour, change in text styles, photos, cartoons or anything. It is a very dull book in terms of presentation.

It is also not a book you can realistically read sequentially, indeed that is another feature of the FAQ format – you only dip into what you need.

Most enquirers online will probably just log on to a site to get a particular problem sorted out and then move on. They are unlikely to stop and browse the entire FAQ section.

One could argue that this book will be of great use those people who find it tiresome continually going to the Anarchist FAQ to find answers – here they can peruse half the site at their own leisure without having to log on. Perhaps having the book will encourage them to dip into topics they hadn't previously considered?

The second section is about the current system and why anarchists oppose it. Note that this book takes a fairly basic view of anarchism – being primarily (but not exclusively) concerned with capital, the state and hierarchy in general and why we oppose them.

Consequently many other features of society that one might also be of interest to people reading such a book – such as the role of the arts, health, both physical and mental well-being, transport, food production and so forth tend to be side-lined. So all this deals with private property, classes and so forth.

The book tries to produce a synthesis of anarchist thinking, accommodating, for example, individualist, collectivist, mutualist, syndicalist and communist approaches, how well it succeeds in this may depend on the reader.

And then we come to the central portion of the book which deals with "myths" of capitalist economics. At which point one FAQ might occur – what is this doing in an anarchist FAQ? Wouldn't a critique of capitalism be better hived off into a Capitalist FAQ?

As it is the "myths" discussed take up 150 pages of technical critique by a variety of mainly non-anarchist writers, who dismantle some of the claims of "Austrian" economists from a variety of standpoints. All very interesting but given that all anarchists oppose capitalism, the fact that some economic theorists have mistaken ideas about how capitalism works is rather irrelevant. Even if their "myths" was true, we would still be in opposition to capitalism.

Individually each section has its merits and those with an interest in the minutiae of economic theory may find this section interesting. Others, I suspect, will find it repetitious if read sequentially.

Like many anarchists most economic theory leaves me cold so this section isn't really my cup of tea.

There is another problem with the text as

add to website

a whole and that it is rather confusing about "anarchist" economics.

On the one hand anarchist-communists want to see the entire monetary system abolished and production based on need outside a market economy.

On the other there are mutualists who make reference to workers' banks and the such-like as if a form of money economy is what anarchists want, only one without capitalists. I suspect we shall have to wait and see what appears in Volume Two of the book where there is a section describing what an anarchist society would look like to see how what the economic proposals are.

Well that's as far as I got with this book before deadlines approached and at my current rate of reading I'm unlikely to finish it for another six months.

In terms of content I have yet to look at the anarchism and ecology section – which I may find of interest and apart from the anarcho-capitalism section (not particularly relevant in the UK, but as the book is co-produced in many countries, it may be more so elsewhere) and another section on the state and capital and how they affect society, there is a short item on the symbols of anarchism.

Now as a reviewer I'm supposed to say whether I think this book is worth buying and/or reading. Well if you just want answers to some questions that anarchists might have answered I'd have to recommend you access the FAQ on-line. If you're not on-line yourself, try a friend, internet cafe, social centre or library.

If you're thinking of buying it again check out the web-site and download those sections you might want to read. Then ask yourself the simple question – do you want to pay another £20 to read this on paper in book form?

If you want a quick and cheerful printed introductions to anarchism there are plenty of well-written and accessible texts out there, including Cliff Harper's "Anarchy - a Graphic Guide", Peter Marshall's history "Demanding the Impossible"; there's Ruth Kinna and Colin Ward's introductory texts and Freedom Bookshop will sell you bucket loads of more detailed books, magazines and pamphlets.

There is definitely a market for an anarchist encyclopaedia, a biographical dictionary, bibliography, selection of quotations and so forth dressed up in a manner that libraries would like.

Whether readers will find this particular selection of questions and answers of use will depend on whether it asks the right questions – and the best way to find out is to consult this as an on-line resource you can dip into when necessary. If subsequently you find it to your taste then a purchase would seem sensible.

By Richard Alexander

In reply: The author's thoughts

Where conflicts of opinion arise between different groups or individuals involved in the paper, Black Flag will generally attempt to give a right to reply. On this note, Iain McKay responds to Richard's thoughts...

I would like, first off, to thank Richard for his review. This reply is a clarification of a few points. He suggests that AFAQ "tries to produce a synthesis of anarchist thinking," which is not the case.

It rather tries to show what the various tendencies of anarchism have in common, building bridges if you like. It does not downplay the differences between "individualist collectivist, mutualist, syndicalist and communist approaches," but it aims to show why, say, Tucker and Kropotkin considered themselves as anarchists and socialists and what they had in common.

In terms of the "myths" of capitalist economics, to answer his question on "what is this doing in an anarchist FAQ?" I would reply twofold.

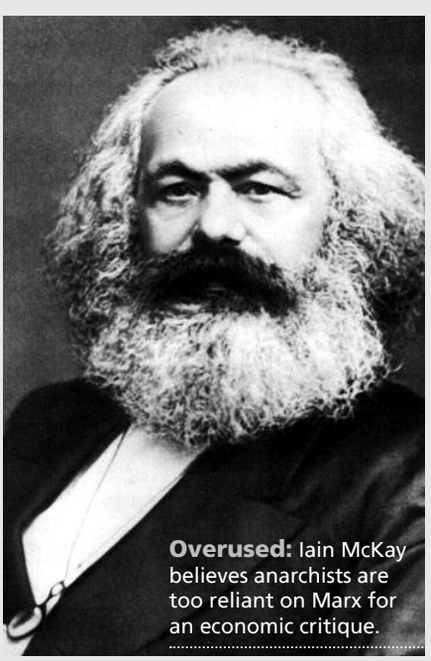
First, economics is an area anarchists can be weak on, often leaving it to Marxists to provide our analysis of capitalism. Yes, Marx made important contributions to the critique of capitalism but both capitalism and bourgeois economics have moved on since 1867 so presenting new developments and critiques is essential. It also aims to show that many "Marxist" positions on capitalism were actually first expounded by anarchists (such as Proudhon).

Second, I would suggest that most activists have come across defenders of capitalism who throw back "Economics 101" at them when they attack capitalism. It is useful to show why capitalist economics is flawed, and how at odds it is with the reality of capitalism. This is particularly the case now that capitalism is in crisis – many people are seeking answers, something hopefully that section provides.

I would also point out that the main focus of that section is not "Austrian" economics but rather mainstream, neo-classical, economics ("Austrian" economics is mostly a sub-branch of that ideology). To state that if the "myths" of capitalism were true "we would still be in opposition to capitalism" ignores the point that this opposition would be made far harder. After all, if rent, interest and profit all genuinely represented the contribution of their owners to the production process, opposing them as the exploitation of labour would be extremely difficult. This section is not really about "the fact that some economic theorists have mistaken ideas about how capitalism" but rather showing the logical and factual flaws in the theories so that a key source of ideological support for capitalism is destroyed. Part of this process is comparing the reality of capitalism with the theories used to justify it.

As for being "rather confusing about 'anarchist' economics" I would say that different anarchist schools do have different perspectives on how a free society would work. I think it wise to explain all schools, as not doing so would be sectarian. However, they share a common perspective on capitalism with both communists and mutualists, for example, seeing exploitation rooted in wage-labour and both aiming to abolish it. But, yes, Volume Two discusses the differences in economic vision for a free society rather than the similar critique of capitalism presented in Volume One.

Finally, I would agree that it is "not a book you can realistically read sequentially," but that is how FAQ's generally work as Richard suggests. Nor is it "a proper reference book" as such – it aims to be an introduction to anarchism and a resource for radicals (fully referenced, of course!). And I would agree that interested readers should consult the website first (anarchistfaq.org.uk). Many who have done so have been keen to see it published.



Overused: Iain McKay believes anarchists are too reliant on Marx for an economic critique.

Hob's Choice

Sex ed: The Solidarity Federation's new pamphlet explores how the state, and religion, manipulate our natural urges

Short reviews: Ade Dimmick (not pictured) summarises some of the new releases in radical pamphlets for 2009

In the last issue of Black Flag (228) I wrote an article entitled Written word on the Streets, which extolled the publishing virtues of radical pamphleteering.

Amongst other things, it highlighted the importance of pamphlets in an online, techno-orientated world.

It concluded by appealing to readers to "give their support to the small press publisher – The printed word and the 'art' of radical pamphleteering must be kept alive – it is a revolutionary tradition that cannot be allowed to die." This sentiment can not be emphasised more.

One of the publishers profiled in the article was Hobnail Press, who up until recently, published Hobnail Review, which was a "guide to small press and alternative publishing from an anti-authoritarian and libertarian-left perspective." HR did micro reviews of pamphlets sent in by other publishers. In late 2008 HR succumbed to financial pressures and subsequently went into a period of hibernation – for the second time since its founding in 2003.

However, the pamphlet publishing and distribution side of the operation is still alive and well. It is therefore hoped that this column will follow in the footsteps of HR – a kind of Son of Hob!

Publishers are invited to submit pamphlets for listing. Each listing will include, publishing details and content summary. (Comprehensive reviews of books will continue to be published elsewhere in Black Flag).

So let's see what's arrived in the mail bag since the last issue.....

Anarchism, Sex and Free Love: The Fight Against Capitalism, Patriarchy and Repressive Religious Morality.
Solidarity Federation.
Pub. Manchester Solidarity Federation 2008.
A5 format. 8pp.
Price 50pence. (Payable, 'Direct Action'). PO Box 29, South West DO, Manchester, M15 5HW, UK.

This short pamphlet tackles a subject often avoided by the left in general and is therefore a bold statement by the British section of the International Workers Association.

Sex and sexuality are rarely discussed openly in society, let alone in revolutionary circles by virtue of the fact that society conditions and suppresses basic and natural urges.

The relationship between capitalism, state power and sexuality is examined. The controlling nature of religion and the family is also touched upon.

The pamphlet accurately sums up: "Whilst human–kind continues to be enslaved by capitalism, patriarchy, the authoritarian morality and other forms of oppression, we can never be truly free".

My main criticism of this pamphlet is that it is far too short – eight pages does not do justice to this important subject.

Rare Doings At Camberwell: Radicals, Subversion and Social Control – A short tour through Camberwell's Underground History.
Pub. Past Tense 2008.
A5 format. 68pp.
Price £1.50 + 50p p&p. (Payable, 'A. Hodson').
c/o 56a infoshop, 56 Crampton Street, London, SE17 3EA, UK.

What a cracking read this is, especially if you are into your radical history like I am. The text is based on research done for a radical history walk around the Camberwell area a couple of years ago.

It covers a wide range of radical and working class activities from the 15th century to date. Throughout the years, Camberwell Green and the surrounding area, has been a vibrant centre for workers revellry, public meetings, rallies, protests and the occassional riot. In the mid-1800's Camberwell saw a large concentration of Chartist activity.

It was also the home of numerous prominent militants of their day. Including, Dan Chatterton, Mary Hays, Una Marson and Vera Brittain. Army mutinies, strikes and anti-fascist actions are also featured. Of particular personal interest is the section on the mental health system survivor's movement – an old friend and comrade, Pete Shaughnessy, a leading activist, is mentioned.

I believe that the most important point about this pamphlet, is that Camberwell is

The printed word and the 'art' of radical pamphleteering must be kept alive. It is a revolutionary tradition that cannot be allowed to die.

Please, no more: A man begs to be released from tortuous lift music

A Century of Writing on the IWW 1905 – 2005: An Annotated Bibliography of Books on the Industrial Workers of the World. Compiled by Steve Kellerman.
Pub. IWW Boston 2007.
A5 format. 38pp.
No price.
PO Box 391724, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139, USA.

As with all bibliographies we are looking at a list of books, and this one kicks off with the Proceedings of the First Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World published in 1905.

The titles are listed under the headings: General Works; Biographical Works; Miscellaneous Works with Some Bearing on the IWW; Writings – poetry and prose; and the IWW in fiction.

A rather impressive list of 226 titles are catalogued. The pamphlet also includes the usual clutch of Wobbly cartoons. This is a useful pamphlet for anyone wanting to find out more about the IWW.

Marriage and Love & Jealousy: Causes and a Possible Cure.
Emma Goldman.
Pub. In the Spirit of Emma 2008.
A5 format. 20pp. 50p. (Payable, 'Active Distro').
c/oActive Distribution, BM Active, London WC1N 3XX, UK.

This pamphlet features two classic essays from Emma Goldman, which were first published in 1911.

In the first essay Marriage and Love, Goldman dismantles the myth that marriage and love are synonymous. That they are in fact antagonistic, having absolutely nothing in common.

To reinforce her case Goldman sources the work of Henrik Ibsen and Edward Carpenter. She writes: "The institution of marriage makes a parasite of woman, an absolute dependent.

It incapacitates her for life's struggle, annilhilates her social consciousness, paralyzes her imagination, and then imposes its gracious protection, which is in reality a snare, a travesty on human character".

In the second essay Jealousy: Cause and a possible cure, she explores relationships, advocating freedom, equality and openess as the key to successful liaisons.

Muzak to my ears: Canned music & Class Struggle. Public space and muzak as policing.
Pub. Past Tense 2008.
A5 format. 18pp.
Price £1.00 + 50p p&p. (Payable, 'A. Hodson').
Address as above.

An interesting study of that dreadful background music that's played in supermarkets, shopping malls, and infact just about everywhere else we go these days.

Amazingly, the concept was created as long ago as 1924, by a former army general called George Owen Squier. It was originally used in factories to make the workers work harder.

Then it was widely used to encourage shoppers to spend more – in technical terms, to enhance sales techniques and marketing.

Call Centres also use it to regulate the moods of callers.

It is now aimed at youngsters hanging out in shopping malls and railway stations, in an attempt to drive them out!

Another similar technique is the use of Mosquito Units, which emit high frequency sounds that only under -25's can hear.

So mum, when your baby or toddler is crying for no apparent reason, they may well have been zapped!

Review: Wide-ranging Walter

The Anarchist Past and Other Essays
Nicholas Walter
David Goodway (editor)
Five Leaves Publications
978-1905512164
Paperback 192pp
£9.99

This is an excellent collection of articles by the late Nicholas Walter.

As can be gathered by its title, it is about anarchist history and covers (in a roughly chronological order) most of key events and people of anarchism – Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, the Paris Commune, Kropotkin, the Russian Revolution, Goldman, Bookchin,Ward as well as other, less famous anarchists, like Joseph Lane and Charlotte Wilson. The articles are drawn from many sources, such as Freedom, Anarchy and The Raven.

All anarchists will gain something from this collection. His reviews of Paul Avrich's The Russian Anarchists and Kronstadt 1921 are essential supplements to both texts, pointing out the errors and omissions of both works.

The review of Quail's history of British Anarchism adds to that work immensely (although I disagree with Walter's suggestion that Quail should have discussed the likes of Herbert Spencer).

All his articles express a wide-ranging grasp of anarchist history and theory and repeatedly show up the pretensions of academics writing on anarchism.

For example, his rebuttal to the suggestion that Godwin's Political Justice is a "sacred text" of anarchism may just state the obvious but does expose the ignorance of the academic in question with style and knowledge.

In summary, a wonderful collection of articles on anarchist history from which all anarchists will benefit from reading.

Given Walter's prolific writing for the movement over the decades, hopefully this will be the first of more collections of his work.

By Iain Mckay

Review: Bookchin's pet project

Social Ecology and Communalism
Murray Bookchin
AK Press
ISBN 978-1904859499
Paperback 118pp.
Price £9.00

This book contains four essays by Murray Bookchin and an introduction by Eirik Eiglad. The Bookchin essays were published in various journals between 1989 and 2002.

The first essay, *What is Social Ecology?,* offers a general introduction to Bookchin's views and I expect most people familiar with his writings will find little new here, but it will serve as a way for those new to Bookchin's work.

The next two essays; *Radical Politics in an Era of Advanced Capitalism* and *The Role of Social Ecology in a Period of Reaction* again add little new to Bookchin's theses, but flesh them out a little more. By far and away the most interesting and contentious essay is the final one *The Communalist Project*,

published in 2002, where Bookchin makes clear his break with what he considered to be anarchism and attempts to carve out an ideological niche for his own project "Communalism". And it's the last essay that I would like to comment on at greater length.

During the 1980s and 1990s Bookchin was engaged in a long polemic against both primitivism and lifestyle anarchism (often blurring the differences between the two). In the end he decided it was simpler to ditch his attachment to the anarchist label and develop his ideas outside of it.

In this essay he clarifies what exactly he understood by the term "anarchist" and eventually he decides that it is merely another form of individualism.

He then distinguishes it from

revolutionary syndicalism which he sees merely a variant form of marxism, a class struggle ideology that is tied to the

factory and what Bookchin regards as hopelessly out-of-date notions of what constitutes the working class, a class he now regards as having been totally

incorporated into capitalist society and posing no particular threat to it.

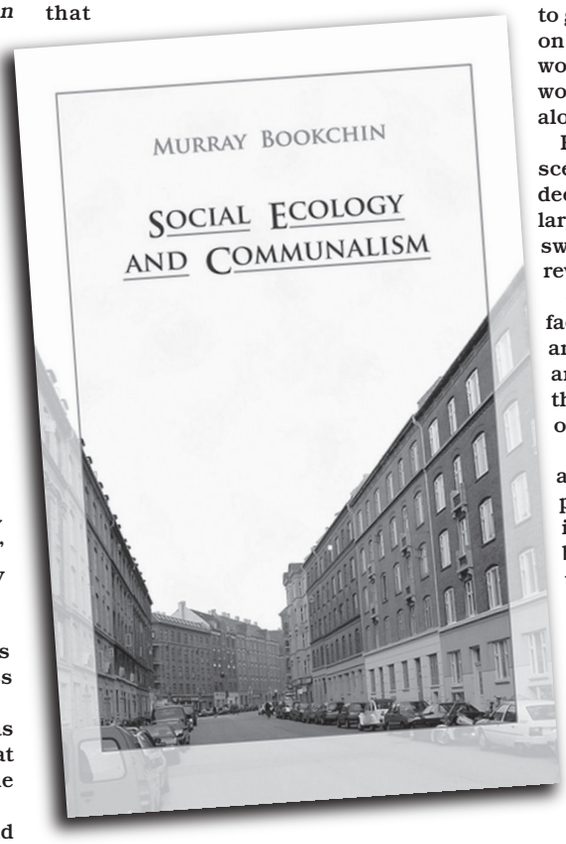
Alongside these he discusses marxism, which, despite the rigour with which it analysed capitalist society in the 19th and early 20th century he regards as obsolete, and whose prioritising of the party form he rejects with arguments that will be familiar to most anarchists.

All three have a fallacious view of politics in Bookchin's opinion, which he regards as the legitimate arena for the discussion of opposing views and the organisation of society in opposition to the state.

Attentive readers might at this stage be wondering what has happened to anarchist or libertarian communism in this debate. Well, unless I missed something Bookchin ignores it, instead opting for the declaration of a new political ideology of Communalism, which takes as its object the project of the people capturing (by democratic means) of town councils, which then hold public assemblies to decide policy, including the municipalisation of the means of production and distribution.

His use of the term Communalism is intended to refer back to a historical heritage that includes the Paris Commune and later Revolutionary Communes. In terms of what these communes or municipalities would be expected to do and how they would conduct themselves there is much similarity with the works of Kropotkin and other anarchist communists.

However where there is a major difference is in the "how we get there" department. Most anarchist communists don't see the communalisation of land and the means of production and distribution as happening outside of a revolutionary struggle, one that



is lead by and with the massive and active participation of what can best be described as as the working classes.

And part of that struggle would involve workers at particular enterprises taking direct control of the workplaces as an integral and essential part of that struggle.

Bookchin, as I understand it, sees things differently. For him the struggle involves getting people elected on to parish or neighbourhood councils (which the UK have such little power as to render them of little interest to revolutionaries, even statist ones, let alone anarchists).

Once elected and once they have a majority they then call an assembly of local people who declare for municipal communalism and take over the means of production and distribution and run them for the benefit for the whole community. Inequalities of power and wealth would be debated and sorted out on a democratic basis, or as Bookchin puts it "they (the assemblies) would become arenas where class conflicts could be played out and where classes could be eliminated.". I presume he means that hierarchies could be dismantled, rather than whole sections of the population disposed of!

This municipalisation would be undertaken piecemeal across the nation (or indeed the world) and the assemblies would federate on a voluntary basis (but wouldn't be able to secede without majority approval of the whole confederation apparently).

Honestly I can't see Bookchin's approach being successful in achieving what he desires.

I can't see revolutionaries using the existing representative democratic methods to gain enough power to call the assemblies, on the off-chance that all of a sudden people would then decide that municipalisation would be a jolly good idea and let's all go along with it.

Rather I suspect a more realistic (?) scenario would involve a widespread and deep-seated revolutionary uprising involving large numbers of people who will simply sweep away existing councils and institute revolutionary assemblies.

Such an uprising would incorporate factory and other workplace occupations and seizures of land from absent landlords and these would be used for the benefit of the whole community, or at least that part of it taking part in the uprising.

The preconditions for such an uprising are a matter for debate, but I doubt a few people getting elected (probably by default if my local councils are anything to go by) is going to trigger any revolutionary upsurge.

More likely anyone choosing to go down that path will either get utterly bored and frustrated and quit or they'll get so absorbed by the minutiae of everyday matters and playing by the rules that they'll be unable to achieve any social change at all.

At best "Communalism" reminds us that some form of democratic decision making format is required in any social body, that individualism is a dead-end and that any social change needs to involve more than just workers taking over factories or electing parties to power.

However as a means to achieving its ends it seems highly unlikely to succeed and I doubt many anarchist communists will thank Bookchin for burying their political tradition as a means of creating space for his own project.

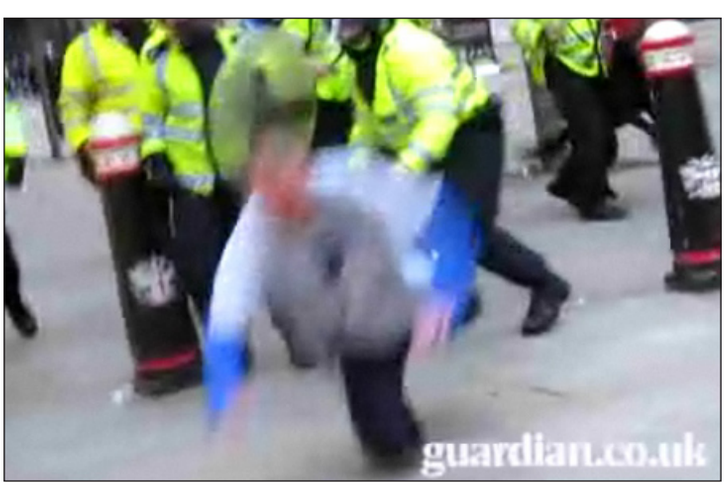
If you want an introduction to Bookchin's thought, or haven't already got the four essays elsewhere, then this is a relatively inexpensive means of doing so.

Others might regard it as a disappointing end to a revolutionary career and return to some of his earlier works.

By Richard Alexander

ACAB: Clockwise from above, the view from inside RBS after the windows were broken, police charge into a line of sitting climate campers, Ian Tomlinson is knocked down, a policeman hits the floor, and a police medic wades in with his baton. Pictures: Indymedia, climate camp.org

In colour: G20 policing



The BIG PICTURE: China's sands

Losing battle: Residents of Minqin, in northwest China's Gansu Province, cover sand with stalks before planting trees. This method of reforestation has held back land loss across millions of hectares, but the effort is dwarfed by deserts which are spreading across the interior of the country and could make up 40% of all China's surface within the next few years. Overexploitation of water reserves and unsustainable farming methods have destroyed vast tracts of land and Minqin, on the edge of the expanding field of dunes, is expected to have run out of groundwater by 2017. Alongside human activity in China itself, the receding of glaciers in the Himalayas is set to have a catastophic effect, as the country, along with India, Bangladesh and others, is heavily dependent on the annual snowmelt to continue irrigating its rice fields. Starvation and death by dehydration is likely to follow for tens of millions over te next few decades.

Picture: China Consulate, Capetown